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On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure: SB1076

On behalf of an emergency medicine physician who strives to provide excellent care to every patient, this bill may have life-threatening consequences if it passes. When your family, friends, and neighbors suffer from heart attacks, strokes, car accidents, and other emergencies, we need the capacity to treat them. That is the purpose of the emergency department.

The pandemic has accelerated many problems that you've probably heard of. One of the most frightening is that hospitals are being pushed over capacity. This is due to a combination of more people using the emergency department for care (how easy is it for you to be seen by a primary care doctor on short notice?), less staff being available to care for these patients (sickness and moral injury from the pandemic have caused many to leave medicine leading to an influx of less experienced replacements), and less ability to move patients out of the hospital when their medical condition has been treated (one reason is because nursing homes are full and there is nowhere else for these patients to go). When we need to transfer a patient who needs subspecialty care, we struggle to find a hospital who has the capacity to accept. We have had to divert resources from our team to care for patients for days in the emergency department who should be admitted to the hospital, but they can't get into a bed because there isn't one available. We see patients in hallways and armchairs to try to keep waiting times down and minimize harm from delays. Operational challenges aside, we still are entrusted with people's lives. To summarize, we are already struggling more than ever to keep up with the demands of our department. We simply do not have the capacity to do the things this bill proposes, and the health of our community will suffer as a consequence.

I am very sympathetic to the homeless individuals in our area and treat them on a regular basis as well. However, requiring the emergency department to shelter, feed, and arrange transportation for individuals who will continue to return because they have no other place to go will mean less beds, staff, and resources for those who truly need emergency care. I propose that instead of assigning these responsibilities to emergency department physicians and nurses, that we redirect attention to the homeless shelters and warming shelters that already exist. Having a place to refer these individuals to addresses the problem that this bill highlights without the devastating consequences to our already-burdened healthcare system. Most physicians went to medical school with the intent to help others, and this situation is no different. Unfortunately, the emergency department is not equipped to solve this problem. Please help us keep patients safe.