

Submitter: Colette Adelman
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB1076

I support this bill from two perspectives, as a sister and as someone whose work exposes me to the repetitive stories of those suffering from both behavioral health and medical conditions being released to the streets without the supplies or resources to survive, let alone thrive. My sister, Janeen, was someone who lived with mental illness her entire adult life. She learned to navigate life, utilize the resources available to her and find a way to function and live independently but when she decompensated her life become a living nightmare. She was not a drug addict, or a criminal. In the midst of a global pandemic, she become lost in the maze of medical and behavioral health red tape, inadequacies and shortages. She was struggling with medical issues as well as delusions and audible hallucinations. Through a series of failures on many agencies parts she ended up on the streets and in the emergency room on multiple occasions in the weeks and days leading up to her death. She was transported by ambulance to Salem Hospital Emergency Dept. (SHED) at least 3 times in two days but kept getting dumped back onto the streets. She was repeatedly at SHED and released back to the streets in the cold of winter, wearing disposable paper clothes. Never did our family receive a phone call even though records show that the hospital and others had the contact information. I learned after the fact that she wandered the streets, naked and confused seeking a way to get cleaned up and clothed. She was at SHED on 12/6 for hypothermia, released on 12/7 to the streets AGAIN, with no effort from staff to contact the family. She laid down on the cold ground on December 8th in downtown Salem and never woke. I lost my only sister when she was just 60 years old. There was no reason for her life to end and neither she, or any living being, deserves to die, cold, alone and confused in one of the richest countries in the world.

The Oregon State Hospital, Salem Health, PacificSource, the PCC, and Marion County Health Services all failed her. If efforts were made to ensure her safety when she was clearly a danger to herself, she would surely still be alive today.

The hospitals and medical facilities are often those who see our unsheltered neighbors at their most vulnerable moments. We need to ensure that honest efforts are made to ensure the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable populations. Case managers can create safety plans, outreach to families and agencies who can coordinate efforts and resources to help ensure people are treated with dignity and given an opportunity to not only survive but thrive. There are many good people trying to do their best to help others, but we need to ensure that people are not sacrificed in the name of efficiency or the financial bottom-line. All people deserve to be cared for in their most vulnerable moments.

Please pass this bill.