

Submitter: Samantha Newton
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3146

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Samantha Newton, and I have the honor of serving as the intensive case manager for Medford's Emergency Lodging. Since stepping into this role on January 8, 2024, I have witnessed transformations that many would call impossible. But I know firsthand that change is possible—because I have lived it. I am in recovery myself, free from all mind-altering substances, including nicotine and caffeine, for over six years. This experience gives me a perspective that extends beyond professional duty; it gives me a personal, deep-rooted understanding of the battles our guests are fighting.

In this past year, I have seen what happens when you give someone even the smallest spark of hope. I have watched people emerge from the depths of despair—some after decades of suffering—and begin to believe in the possibility of a different life. I have seen the moment when the light returns to someone's eyes, when fear is replaced with hope, when survival is no longer their only goal—because for the first time in years, they feel safe enough to think beyond just making it to tomorrow.

Each week, during our house meetings, we check in—not just with updates or rules, but with each other as human beings. We share fears, big feelings, victories, and struggles. Sometimes, we just eat pizza and remember what it feels like to belong. And last week, one of my guests shared something that stopped me in my tracks.

They expressed their gratitude—not for a job, or a car, or anything grand. But for the simple dignity of being able to take a shower when they needed one. For a toilet. For a bed. For a door they could lock and feel safe behind.

Think about that for a moment. A door. A shower. A bed. The things so many of us take for granted every single day—things we consider basic, fundamental parts of life—are the very things that have been out of reach for so many people for far too long.

I imagine many of you are familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If not, it's simple:

Physiological needs—food, water, shelter.

Safety needs—security, stability, protection.

Love and belonging—human connection.

Esteem—self-worth, dignity, recognition.

Self-actualization—growth, potential, purpose.

Emergency Lodging is not just a shelter. It is a lifeline. It is a bridge from the streets to treatment, from chaos to stability, from hopelessness to recovery. It is an opportunity—one that over 200 people have been given—to be treated as equals. To sleep without fear of being attacked in the night. To begin the process of healing without the constant terror of where they'll rest their head. To take the first step toward breaking free from addiction—because when your basic needs are met, you can finally start thinking about what comes next.

I won't sugarcoat it. It hasn't been perfect. Change never is. But isn't that the very nature of life? It is messy. It is unpredictable. But it is also full of second chances and redemption. And the good—the overwhelming, undeniable good—outshines the struggles a hundred times over.

We live in a world that is different from the one we knew before. And if the world has changed, then so must we. The old ways are not enough. It is time for solutions that reflect the reality we live in now. It is time for bold, compassionate change.

I am not writing this letter for myself. I am writing for the people who are still out there, waiting for their chance. For the ones who didn't make it in time. For those who are one warm meal, one safe night, one helping hand away from finally believing that change is possible.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Thank you for being in a position to make a difference. I hope today brings you clarity, compassion, and the courage to choose change.

With gratitude,
Samantha Newton
Intensive Case Manager at Emergency Lodging