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Statement in Support of L.D. 1301, An Act To Support Transitional Housing for Persons Experiencing Abuse, Dangerous Living Conditions, Economic Insecurity Due to Divorce or Separation, Chronic Homelessness, Substance Use Disorder or Mental Disorders

April 20, 2021

Law enforcement officers frequently come into contact with persons who are experiencing abuse, dangerous living conditions, economic insecurity due to divorce or separation, chronic homelessness, substance use disorder or mental disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Sometimes these encounters result from calls for help from these people, and sometimes because they may be acting out in a way that results in calls to the police to investigate a disturbance.

Often, these interactions involve people who do not have adequate housing or any housing at all. Lack of safe, adequate shelter often exacerbates their problems. Often they also lack the job skills necessary to find gainful employment or lack adequate health care that could help them deal with their distress.

Much attention is being focused currently on the interactions between law enforcement and persons in distress, in particular, those with mental disorders. Law enforcement agencies are taking steps to respond to persons in crisis in ways beyond simply arresting them and criminalizing their behavior. These steps include but are not limited to additional training for officers and referrals to behavioral health specialists or homeless shelters.

Ideally, the need for interactions between law enforcement and persons in distress would diminish. We believe that these interactions would, in fact, diminish if persons in distress had reliable shelter, job training assistance and health care while they are struggling to get their lives back together. Not only would these services help persons in distress, they would also free up law enforcement resources and personnel to deal with serious criminals and threats to public safety.

We urge you give an Ought to Pass report to L.D. 1301.