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From: Cathy Alderman <calderman@coloradocoalition.org>

Subject: Testimony on SB 21

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Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee – My apologies for my testimony not all coming through during testimony today. I have provided it below for your consideration:

My name is Cathy Alderman, and I am the Chief Communications and Public Policy Officer for the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. I have also served on the Housing Subcommittee of the Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal Justice System Task Force for the past 4.5 years. Most recently, I served as the Vice Chair for the SubPanel to the Affordable Housing Transformational Task Force where issues of housing, the homeless-to-jail cycle, homelessness, and housing considerations for people with behavioral health issues were significant topics of interest.

I am pleased to see SB 21 and the reauthorization of the Task Force and Oversight Committee. However, I was surprised to see that housing no longer appears to be a priority or focus of study for the Task Force. I'm hoping that this was an oversight and not an expression of a de-prioritization of housing as one of the most critical factors in determining whether someone will enter the criminal justice system, be able to manage any behavioral or mental health issues and be subject to the homelessness-to-jail cycle.

For the last few years, the Housing Subcommittee has brought together numerous experts in housing, behavioral health, Medicaid policy and reimbursement, and homelessness to talk through the complex relationships between behavioral/mental health, the criminal justice system, and homelessness. These conversations have led to important policy recommendations many of which have become the basis of legislation brought forward by the Task Force including in 2020 HB1035 – Programs to Develop Housing Support Services. If not for the Housing Subcommittee of this Task Force, critical conversations and policy recommendations about housing, supportive services funding, and disrupting the homelessness-to-jail cycle may not have occurred and today these topics are critical to the many policy and legislative efforts of the full General Assembly.

We all know that housing is the cornerstone on which any individual needs to thrive in all areas of their life. A person's unhoused status is often the very thing that will lead them into the criminal justice system to begin with especially if they are living with a mental or behavioral

health issue. Further, whether someone with a mental or behavioral health issue is released from the criminal justice system into a stable housing situation is predictive of whether and how often they are likely to return to jail or prison. Formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public.

Behavioral and mental health issues cannot be adequately addressed without stable housing. Criminal justice involvement – both from entry, exit, and re-entry – occurs at much higher rates among people experiencing or at high risk for homelessness. For these reasons, housing must be part of the conversation for this Task Force and the Oversight Committee. In order to continue the critical work of the Housing Subcommittee for this Task Force and Oversight Committee, we recommend three potential changes to SB21:

- The Legislative Declaration should clearly recognize and prioritize the critical intersection between housing status, criminal justice involvement, and behavioral health issues.
- Housing should be identified as a priority and specified area of study for the Task Force
- A representative from the Division of Housing or Office of Homeless Initiatives should be a regular member of the Task Force.

Thank you for your time today and your commitment to assisting people with behavioral health issues who are involved with the criminal justice system.

Cathy Alderman (she, her, hers) JD/MSPH
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The mission of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless is to work collaboratively toward the prevention of homelessness and the creation of lasting solutions for homeless and at-risk families, children, and individuals throughout Colorado.

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