

Testimony Provided to the Joint Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee
By Judy Cushing, CEO of Lines for Life (formerly Oregon Partnership)
March 27, 2013

Testimony in favor of HB 5042
Funding for the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training

27 percent of Oregon suicides are by Veterans, well ahead of the national average. Oregon has deployed thousands of National Guard troops over the past several years and, for many, the transition back to civilian life has been difficult. Coupled with PTSD, mental distress, and the high rate of suicides among National Guard members several years ago, police are frequently called to intervene.

The goal of the mental health professionals and veterans at Lines for Life is to help public safety officers including city police, county sheriff departments and state police be better able to understand and identify veterans and veteran issues which will help them de-escalate situations and keep both police and veterans safe during police - veteran contacts.

Lines for Life has extensive knowledge and expertise in helping veterans in crisis. We operate a fully anonymous 24/7 Military HelpLine staffed by veterans and experts in mental health crisis. We are the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) for Oregon and a Back Up Center for the National V.A. Crisis Lines. Lines for Life has been providing training around Veteran's mental health issues since 2010. We have been able to de-escalate 98 percent of the suicide calls we receive.

Lines for Life has been asked by the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) to provide DPSST classes with de-escalation training to better equip trainees when confronted with individuals who are mentally ill, combative, or suicidal. The training will focus on de-escalation of mental health issues and suicide ideation in the veteran population. States who train officers and first responders in crisis and suicide intervention skills save lives, save criminal justice resources and valuable social service resources.

The Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) provides crucial training for all public safety officers in the state, fire departments, and 911 operators. An adequate budget is crucial to maintaining the safety of all Oregonians.

Lines for Life urges support of DPSST's proposed budget.