



Comments in Opposition to Senate Bill 506
From Chris Bouneff, Executive Director, NAMI Oregon
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Senate Health Care and Human Services Committee

NAMI Oregon wishes to express its opposition to Senate Bill 506, which would severely restrict placement of secure residential treatment facilities that serve as an important element in Oregon's mental health treatment and service array. As has been with similar legislation proposed in the past, we believe the premise of this bill — that individuals undergoing treatment for mental illness are dangerous — is flawed and prejudicial.

Individuals and families who enter Oregon's treatment system do so to gain the help they need to achieve recovery. They may enter directly into a residential facility or home, or they may step down from a setting such as the Oregon State Hospital. They may be a civil patient, or they may have entered treatment through our legal system and be under the jurisdiction of the Psychiatric Security Review Board. Regardless, the goals and the outcomes are similar. They wish to recover, and recovery is overwhelmingly likely.

Whether secure or not, residential treatment facilities and homes are community facilities. They must be part of the fabric of the community so that residents recover within integrated settings that most reflect the environment to which they will return. Any treatment facility, must at a minimum meet this standard. After all, the final stop for residents will likely be independent or semi-independent housing. And residents are just that — residents, entitled to the protection of the Fair Housing Act and the Americans With Disabilities Act and to the privacy protections contained in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

Ultimately, we must remind ourselves that the fear that drives proposals such as this generally is fed by stigma and misinformation. Legislation such as SB 506 takes the presumptive view that housing for people with mental illness requires more stringent supervision so that those who reside can be better excluded from community living environments. The practical impact is that public officials will be able to dictate by regulation where individuals can and cannot reside through a process that sweeps to society's margins anyone deemed different or "scary" by those with little or no knowledge of mental illness. Reality is that these are healing environments for people who are there by virtue of their illness alone, and not because they are dangerous. Reality is that they will recover and live in exactly the same communities from which this legislation attempts to remove them.

As Oregon continues down its path to integrate mental health care into more communities, we urge the committee to take a pass on SB 506 and ensure that access to effective treatment and living environments is maintained. Thank you for this opportunity to express our opposition to SB 506.