

Chair Greenlick, Members of the Committee -

I am before you today to express my strong opposition to HB 2090 - the latest attempt by the Oregon Health Authority to restrict access to treatments for our state's most vulnerable citizens: mentally ill Oregon Health Plan patients.

Unfortunately, this seems to be a perennial issue – an attempt to balance the budget on the backs of those with the quietest voice. I am here to speak for the state's mentally ill – loud and clear – THEIR MEDICAL PROVIDER SHOULD MAKE THE DETERMINATION AS TO WHICH DRUG IS NECESSARY TO ALTER THEIR BRAIN CHEMISTRY.

Currently we are having discussions about improving access to mental health services in the wake of the tragedies in Newtown and our own Clackamas Town Center shooting. Why would we want to add an additional burden to the very population we are trying so urgently to help?

Access to medications is not a new issue for this body – nor is it a partisan one. Medicaid patients were first guaranteed “open access” to prescribed treatments in 1977 – an issue championed by the late Senator Bill McCoy a Democrat from Portland. Over the years, I have joined with many of our colleagues to maintain this access, with the purpose of ensuring the integrity of the doctor/patient relationship and good patient care.

While the face of the Medicaid prescription drug program has changed a bit over the years, we have NEVER altered our laser focus on the well-being of the patient as the key consideration in our deliberations. TO THIS DAY, the prescriber has the last word on which drug his or her Medicaid patient should receive (“prescriber prevails”) and mentally ill persons are ensured access to the right drug at the right time.

I remain committed to protecting this access for those with mental illnesses and urge this committee to restore the language of the existing mental health carve out which is missing from HB 2090. While the bill proposes a “protection” for REFILLS of mental health drugs, that is not enough. Too often, issues of maintenance and compliance challenge the already complicated treatment of mental illness. Dictating which drug patients must swallow first – before

providing the drug actually prescribed by their doctor – is not a sound health care practice NOR a smart economic choice. Instead, we need to do everything in our power to ensure our state’s mentally ill population receive The Right Drug, At the Right Time, The First Time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jackie Winters".

Senator Jackie Winters

District 10