

AOCMHP



Association of Oregon Community
Mental Health Programs
local solutions local accountability

AOCMHP Testimony In Support of SB 739

April 7, 2015

Dear Chair Gelser and Members of the Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee:

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs (AOCMHP), I would like to express our support for SB 739. CMHPs have responsibility for helping people with mental illness transition from prison and jail into appropriate community treatment.

It is a travesty that so many people with serious mental illness (SMI) are in prisons and jails. A significant portion of individuals with serious mental illness cycle in and out of criminal justice systems (31 percent incarcerated 10 or more times), and the percentage of people with SMI is two to four times higher in prison than in the general community. People with greater psychiatric needs are more likely to be victims of violence or suicide and to be housed in segregation while incarcerated.

I know we will look back at this point in our history -- how we incarcerate people with mental illness -- with deep shame and regret, just as we view insane asylums of previous centuries. I hope that during my lifetime we will be able to say that jails and prisons are no longer our de facto mental health treatment facilities.

In the interim, while we still have so many people with mental illness in prison and jails, we strongly support the standards of care for DOC inmates with serious mental illness as outlined in SB 739.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Cherryl L. Ramirez

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Director, AOCMHP