



February 9, 2016

TO: Representative Jeff Barker, Chair
House Committee on Judiciary
FR: Bob Joondeph, Executive Director
RE: HB 4116

Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) is Oregon's federally-funded *Protection and Advocacy* office that provides legal-based advocacy services to Oregonians with disabilities. An increasing focus of our work has concentrated on access to treatment services for individuals with mental illness or physical disabilities in jails and prisons. The steady increase in the number of inmates with mental illness in jail and prison is well-documented. Those institutions have struggled to keep up with the cost and efficacy of necessary health services.

We applaud Representative Weidner for sponsoring HB 4116 that creates a task force to analyze this problem. We believe that the work of the task force would be improved by having at least one member that is versed in the statutory and constitutional requirements for medical and mental health services for prisoners. This is a role that DRO would be pleased to play. Since 1986, DRO has monitored local jails and, from time to time, represented individuals who have been unable to obtain adequate mental health services and medical accommodations for their disabilities.

In our view, improving health services will require an examination of which individuals are appropriate for incarceration and which can benefit safely from structured diversion. Similarly, smooth transitions from jail to community treatment options can pay immediate and long-term benefits in reducing recidivism and stemming the expense and effects of chronic health conditions. Attempts to cut jail medical costs by contracting with for-profit medical providers have generally resulted in poor services in jail and shifting financial burdens to other public sources.

For these reasons, DRO supports passage of HB 4116 and ask the committee to add us as a participant on the task force. We also suggest that community corrections agencies be added to county jails, sheriff departments and OHA as an area that improvements should be considered.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.