

March 27, 2017

We are writing to urge an increase in housing for adults living with mental illness.

Our adult son lives with the dual diagnosis of severe mental illness and substance abuse. He relies on public agencies and mental health professionals for support, treatment and subsidized housing. Sadly, our son has spent many days living on the streets, weeks locked up in jail for petty crimes and months confined to hospital psychiatric units and the Oregon State Hospital while he waited for appropriate housing to become available.

In numerous instances he has lived in very expensive places that provide more intensive care than he needs and which cost more money than an apartment or group home, because an appropriate residence was not available. He has a friend who lives with mental illness who has resided for three months now in a motel, mostly paid for by the county, while they search for an apartment for him. Subsidizing his friend's rent would amount to less than half of what the motel costs. But there is no apartment to be found.

Today our son is one of the "lucky ones." He has his own apartment. His neighbors adore him. He is always ready to help anybody in need and keeps his apartment spotless. His apartment living is only possible because of the financial and treatment support from numerous professionals who form his "treatment team." He loves his independence and tells us he is committed to taking his medication and sticking with his treatment plan. He knows these things are essential to maintain his mental health and keep his apartment.

Hopefully our son will stay healthy, but we know that mental illness symptoms can rear their ugly heads anytime, regardless of his commitment to medication and treatment. In fact, this happened last fall. But because he had an apartment to return to, he was able to spend "only" six weeks locked up in a psychiatric hospital before he was able to "go home to his own place" where he is doing great.

Nobody asks to suffer a serious mental illness. When psychotic symptoms emerge, it is devastating and heart breaking for the individual, their family and the community as a whole. And it is even worse when your son or daughter has no safe place to live. Additional housing resources are so important for mentally ill adults who, though no fault of their own, have no place to call home.

Sincerely,
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