

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Co-Chair Sanchez, Co-Chair Olson and House Committee on Human Services and Housing Committee Members:

Thanks for the opportunity to provide you with testimony on HB 2903.

I really appreciate the work done by many of you, especially Representative Olson and Senator Prozanski on this bill addressing child safety in our community.

When Looking Glass was forced to close our Psychiatric Residential Service last year, it was primarily due to a lack of adequate funding provided by contracts with the State of Oregon and Coordinated Care Organizations. Those payment rates were only covering about 65% of our cost of care. However the final blow was implementation of SB1515, which created a regulatory environment that was impossible to meet financially. Overworked and underpaid staff were spending significant time answering questions and providing extensive documentation to investigators that took time away from direct care to the children and youth. Staff also grew more concerned that a simple mistake could cause a punitive response, with negative consequences to their career and the future of the services provided. HB 2903 was addressing many of these concerns.

The current amended bill before you does not implement change enough to allow my agency to consider re-opening Psychiatric Residential Services at this time.

However, I understand and appreciate the negotiated amendments Senator Gelser has provided. They provide a small but significant step in the right direction.

I support HB2903 with amendments as presented before this committee today.

Thank you for your work on this.

Sincerely,



Craig Opperman, MSE

President/Chief Executive Officer

Looking Glass Community Services



Looking Glass
Community Services

Administrative Office

Looking Glass Programs

Counseling Services

Runaway & Homeless Services

Education & Vocational Services

Residential Services

Dear Staff and Board of Looking Glass Community Services,

On December 9, 2016, after 6 years of safety, care and healing to the most vulnerable and traumatized children of our community, Looking Glass closed our Intensive Psychiatric Residential Services. This very difficult decision was caused by years of insufficient funding magnified by extreme, unfunded regulatory requirements.

While all of our contractors agreed how vital and needed this service was, fiscal support was minimal and regulatory requirements were prohibitive to safe, therapeutic services.

All of our state contractors agreed that our staff salaries, set by state contracted amounts, were more than 30% below market rates, 50% if you calculate benefits. While staff recruitment and retention were difficult, we managed to find dedicated, caring professionals willing to commit to serving and healing traumatized young clients.

Our Board and Development Team were amazing as they provided funds and resources through donations and grants to make up our structural deficit.

Then came the implementation of Senate Bill 1515, which caused our program and administration staff to shift significant time away from therapeutic service delivery into compliance efforts. An already under-resourced and over-worked staff was now spending hours in interviews, on the phone and providing extensive documentation to state investigators, licensing and other regulatory bodies that often asked for multiple submissions of information already provided. However, while the unjust and punitive approach of SB1515 is related to our program closure, that is a topic for another conversation.

The bottom line is we were never given adequate support, resources and regulatory relief/efficiency to operate. We finally hit a breaking point.

My final plea before closure was to ask for help from the state to cover some of our compliance costs. That was rejected.

It is noteworthy that to implement SB1515, the Oregon Department of Human Services received more funding and positions. The Oregon Office of Adult Abuse Prevention and Investigations received more funding and positions. Private providers of life-saving services to children, youth and families only received added cost and regulatory requirements.



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Our program's closure, especially in light of shrinking resources and many of the State's children being housed in offices and hotel rooms, is tragic. Twelve beds of a state-licensed, nationally-accredited program with proven positive outcomes for high acuity youth, gone!

This is heart-breaking for our dedicated staff, our Board and supporters in the community. It is most tragic and heartbreaking for those extremely vulnerable, traumatized children, youth and families that have now lost this service.

The children and youth in need of behavioral health in our state are truly facing a crisis. Looking Glass will continue to help in any way possible. With adequate support we could re-establish this program. Right now we are consumed with keeping safe, quality services running in our other programs. That is an arduous task in this climate. We will work to avoid any more closures in the future. Yet Oregon must prioritize resources and funding for these services. The children, youth, and families of all of our communities deserve it.

Sincerely,

Craig Opperman, MSE
Looking Glass Community Services
President/Chief Executive Officer



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