

Testimony for Public Hearing
Senate Committee on Health Care
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Testimony in favor of Senate Bill 141

Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

My name is David Westbrook and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Lines for Life. Lines for Life is a nonprofit where the mission is preventing substance and suicide and promoting mental wellness. We do this in part by answering crisis lines in all three of these areas. Lines for Life is the Oregon affiliate for the National Suicide Prevention Line and the only non-governmental agency to answer America's Veterans Crisis Line. We answer Oregon's statewide alcohol and drug helpline and military helpline. We operate a YouthLine as well as a senior loneliness line and we provide after-hours support to numerous community mental health providers. Last year, across all of these lines, we answered over 100,000 calls.

Today I am here to speak in favor of Senate Bill 141 which will provide support to hospitals to carry out one of the most well researched and effective suicide prevention strategies that we have for individuals leaving hospitals after coming into an emergency department with suicide ideation or having made a suicide attempt. The strategy is known as "Caring Contacts". Caring contacts are brief connections with patients, post-discharge, which are intended to engage patients who have left the hospital setting.

Individuals who are seen in hospitals for suicide ideation or suicide attempts are at much higher risk of dying by suicide in the months following their discharge. There are preventative measures which can be taken to lessen the likelihood of a post hospital discharge. Key prevention measures include proper intervention while in the hospital, connecting patients with a family member or lay caregiver, establishing a follow-up visit for outpatient services, and providing caring contacts.

For several years, Lines for Life has taken part in research headed by Dr. Gould at Columbia University and funded by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration. In the current study we partner with Providence to provide follow-up calls to patients who have entered the hospital due to

suicide ideation or suicide attempts. The majority of patients in Dr. Gould's research report that follow-up calls either kept them safe or prevented them from killing themselves. Additionally, the higher the number of calls the higher the patients perception of whether or not the calls had an impact on their safety and keeping themselves from killing themselves.

Additional research has calculated the cost savings of hotlines providing follow-up calls to both private insurance providers and Medicaid. The cost savings are significant with a return on investment of \$1.70 to \$2.05 for every \$1.00 spent.

Currently Lines for Life is contracting with several hospitals to provide caring contacts. These hospitals have sought us out because we have the training, systems, protocol and, experience to ensure success.

Partnering with hospitals, we can drive down the number of deaths by suicide in post-discharge patients and save the health care system significant dollars. I urge you to consider passing SB 141.

Sincerely,

David Westbrook, COO
Lines for Life