

February 27, 2019

Isaiah Mitchell
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RE SB 375

Chair Senator Prozanski
Vice Chair Senator Thatcher
Senator Bentz
Senator Fagan
Senator Gelser

Senator Linthicum
Senator Manning

I am a resident at Oregon State Hospital (OSH) and work as a Peer Advisory Council Facilitator. I learn about the concerns and ideas of other residents of all commitment types in this work. I am at OSH because I pled Guilty Except for Insanity to charges in 2006. Many of my fellow GEI peers have expressed concern that this Bill will not accomplish what was intended as is.

When I made the GEI plea, my understanding was that my options were to choose between 2 plea agreements. One was through regular corrections, and would have allowed me to leave right away considering time served and 2 years parole/probation. The other option was to get mental health help at the hospital. I did not know this meant I was likely to live 20 years under the Psychiatric Security Review Board (PSRB). I told my attorney I wanted the hospital route.

After sentencing and before I went to OSH, my attorney met with me to say goodbye. I made a comment about the next two years. My attorney corrected me and said it was 20 years Mr Mitchell. I was absolutely stunned. I had no idea that this is what I had agreed to.

Many of my peers have similar stories. I have met so many people who say they were under the impression they would be at the hospital for a few months. Most of my peers have said they also did not understand what they were agreeing to by taking the GEI plea. The control the PSRB has over us is something very few of us are aware before making the choice to take a GEI plea.

This bill is better than current practice where people are not consistently receiving the information they need. However, my peers have shared that they want to be sure this bill includes more information, time to reflect, and an opportunity to ask questions before committing to a plea. I agree with my peers.

We need much more information about what life under PSRB means and how long that may be. When I am in wellness, I regret nothing. But if I had to do it all over again – I am not sure my choice would have been the same if I really understood what I was agreeing to. It's just not right to have people making such important decisions without accurate information. I hope you can amend this bill to ensure people like me understand what life under PSRB is really like before they commit to a GEI plea.