

To Members of the House Committee on Health Care
From Bob Nikkel, MSW

Chair Hayden and members of the committee:

I am providing this testimony in support of HB 2831 to establish peer respite centers in 3 parts of the state. While I am testifying as a public citizen, I have served the State of Oregon for nearly 2 decades, from 1990 to 2009, nearly 6 of those years as the director of mental health and addictions services.

I applaud the introduction of this bill. It comes in part as a result of Oregon's leadership for many years in the development and successful implementation of peer services. One of those early projects was the Community Survival Program in the early 1990s which assigned some of the most difficult to discharge patients from Dammasch State Hospital to peers who had themselves been patients and who had been trained in case management. It was highly successful and received national attention through an article I co-authored and was later referenced in the 1996 US Surgeon General's report on mental health in 1996.

Oregon has since continued to support peer delivered services with public funding like Dual Diagnosis Anonymous and the Peer Recovery Services Team at Oregon State Hospital. We also established one of the first consumer councils in the country composed entirely of people who had themselves experienced major mental health challenges. For over 15 years, the Consumer Advisory Council has provided expert policy and program analysis and advocacy.

HB 2831 will continue Oregon's place in providing peer services and supports to people in severe crises and who would otherwise be at high risk for the quite limited inpatient psychiatric beds around the state. Most people and their families would much prefer to avoid hospitalization and HB 2831 would make those alternatives available. Frankly, no one better understands what it is like and how to recover than the people who would serve as staff in these facilities. We have seen the power of peers throughout Oregon for many years.

I hope that the committee will move this bill along through the process with a do pass recommendation.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions. If I am unable to attend the hearing, I can be reached at (503) 929-9346 or by email at bobnikkel@gmail.com