



March 14, 2019

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
Oregon 2019 Legislative Session

Subject: AOC Testimony on SB 5525

Dear Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Nosse and Members of the Subcommittee,

Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to comment on SB 5525 and specifically OHA's budget for behavioral health.

I am Xan Augerot, a third year Benton County Commissioner. Gaps in our mental health system was one of the top constituent themes as I ran for office in 2016. In 2018, I facilitated a year-long Benton County Criminal Justice Assessment, focusing on our local system from first encounter with law enforcement to release back into the community.

Most recently, Benton County participated in the Behavioral Health Justice Reinvestment technical assistance effort. Our local assessment found that we have the 6th highest crime rate in the state, the smallest jail per capita, and the oldest courthouse. Although we would dearly like to increase mental health diversion opportunities, our District Attorney's Office has not grown in capacity for 25 years – and, our DAs are facing competing stresses from Grand Jury recordation mandate and the adoption of body worn cameras by all of our law enforcement agencies.

Although we have instituted crisis response training, we do not have a formal crisis response team, any pretrial assessment program or a respite center for those in mental health crisis. Crisis intervention and treatment are essential, and I strongly support the recommendations for increased behavioral health resources to address the needs of justice involved individuals. We have a cadre of people that cycle in and out of our jail – and we currently do not have the tools to stop the revolving door.

We also need support for discharge planning, to support our community members' re-entry into the community with appropriate care. That said, it is also critical to address issues upstream. Through investments in public health modernization, we will be able to better address social determinants of health, such as housing instability and food insecurity. If we can keep people out of the criminal

justice system and the Emergency Department, we will reduce systems costs and, more importantly, save lives.

I also ask you to please support public health policy option 402 to fund suicide prevention efforts, in addition to other policy option packages cited by Cherryl Ramirez, so that our county mental health programs can be as robust as possible and we can invest in communitywide well-being to reduce the number of Benton County residents in need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Xanthippe Augerot", written in a cursive style.

Xanthippe Augerot, Benton County Commissioner