



**Sharon Meieran**  
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1

To: Senate Committee On Human Services  
Date: March 21, 2019  
Re: Support for Senate Bills 1 & 221

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Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Heard, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sharon Meieran, I'm a Multnomah County Commissioner and a practicing emergency physician. I am so pleased to offer testimony in support of Senate Bills 1 and 221, which support much-needed improvements and capacity building in our system of care for children and youth with complex needs.

Over the past year, the Children and Youth with Specialized Needs Workgroup has grappled with many challenging questions about how to better serve youth in our state who have complex needs. To understand the kinds of youth this group has been talking about, all you really need to do is look at the workgroup roster -- participants represent schools, health plans, hospitals, corrections, child welfare, local mental health providers, and others. The multiple intersections of care, payment, jurisdiction, responsibility, and intense need that all converge in the lives of some of the most vulnerable youth in our state can be overwhelming.

Just one month into the workgroup's process, an emergency physician colleague reached out to me, desperate to find help for a nine-year-old in DHS custody who had been boarding in their emergency department for 22 days. Twenty-two days of trauma, uncertainty, fear, and frustration for this youth and for providers across multiple sectors who tried to find the resources to support this child in a system that simply did not have capacity. This situation was emblematic of the need for the workgroup, and sadly not unique. The needs of that child could not be met by one system alone, nor by multiple siloed systems, but only by a coordinated system of shared responsibility and accountability.

Senate Bill 1 formalizes a shared commitment to hold each of our systems accountable for creating a more seamless, coordinated, culturally responsive, quality system of care for vulnerable youth. As counties are part of this continuum, I would support an amendment to include specific Local Mental Health Authority representation on the Advisory Council envisioned by the bill, as well as inclusion of consumers and people of color.

The needs of youth today warrant urgent action, and Senate Bill 221 outlines meaningful investments to address prominent system gaps identified by the workgroup. Establishing a strong coordination and planning entity through a Statewide System of Care Advisory Council ensures that we continue to thoughtfully and holistically improve systems. Combined, these measures represent a strong commitment to doing better for youth, today and in the future. Thank you for your consideration, and I encourage you to support Senate Bills 1 and 221.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Meieran