



To: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Sheriff Jason Myers, Marion County Sheriff's Office
Oregon State Sheriffs' Association
Oregon Association Chiefs of Police

Date: March 26, 2019

Re: HB 973 – Testimony in Support

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Jason Myers and I am the Marion County Sheriff. I'm here today testifying in support of Senate Bill 973 on behalf of the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association and Oregon Association Chiefs of Police.

I'd like to begin my comments by first thanking Legislative Leadership, OHA Director Pat Allen, and CJC Director Mike Schmidt for their leadership and efforts in bringing together the Behavioral Health Justice Reinvestment Steering Committee which met multiple times to carefully review and vet the policy recommendations contained in SB 973 and HB 3281.

Members of the community often ask me the question, "what is the biggest public safety issues facing our community." Without hesitation I tell them, mental illness, addiction or combination of both are the issues that utilize most of the resources our public safety systems have to offer. While our public safety system is intended to protect the members of our community, it was never designed to address individuals with chronic and persistent mental illness or addiction issues. Unfortunately, the criminal justice system has become our de facto mental health and addiction treatment system. Research has shown that arresting, incarcerating and repeating this cycle makes an individual with these conditions worse, not better.

Over my 29 year career in public safety, I've watched the population of individuals with mental illness or addiction issues that touch the Criminal Justice System grow, while services have not.

In Marion County, we have worked hard over the last 10 years to create a public safety system that works collaboratively with our mental/addiction health systems and providers to ensure that when an individual with a behavioral health or addiction issue has contact with the public safety system, they are connected to community based services in lieu of the criminal justice system. We have benefitted from grants and OHA investments that really helped launch our most successful programs. With this system in place we have seen some promising results through decreased jail bookings, decreased utilization of the Emergency Department and

decreased utilization of the State Hospital. While these results look promising, we know there are still gaps in our system and more work to be done to achieve fidelity.

I believe that an upstream approach is a must for this population and the situation we find ourselves in. Community based behavioral services/programs are badly needed in every community across our state, and this bill would provide resources and guidance to counties who in turn can develop programs that will enhance access to services for those who truly need it. Every community across our state would benefit positively from this opportunity, but in our frontier and rural communities it would be game changer, as they struggle with providing any mental health services.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the collective support from the Sheriffs and Police Chiefs Associations' for SB973. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.