



Sharon Meieran

Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1

To: House Committee on Behavioral Health
From: Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County Commissioner
Date: February 03, 2020
Re: Support for House Bill 4082

Chair Greenlick, Vice Chairs Hayden and Mitchell, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 4082 which would establish a Behavioral Health Road Map Commission to drive a clear, sustained, accountable process to improve and oversee behavioral health care systems over the next decade.

When Oregon embarked on a vision of “deinstitutionalization”, that vision came with a promise of a robust system of community mental health to serve as a much-needed alternative to institution based care. While Dammasch State Hospital closed its doors, the state never truly delivered on an adequately funded, properly overseen system of behavioral health care. The consequences of that disinvestment have been devastating, and have left people with behavioral health issues to struggle on our streets, in our hospitals, and in our jails and prisons. I see this firsthand as an emergency physician, and I see it as a policy maker in Multnomah County where mental health systems transformation has been my top priority.

Over the past several years Oregon’s attention to behavioral health has intensified, giving rise to countless sector-specific efforts aimed at addressing this issue at the state, regional, and local level. While this increased attention is positive -- and absolutely necessary -- these groups are not formally connected, many are not permanent, and they do not represent the integrated approach needed to address the fundamental interconnectedness of behavioral health, housing and the criminal justice system. While critical, this current work does not immediately translate into the kind of long-term, sustained, accountable structure required to establish an overarching vision and attach the necessary decision-making power and funding to achieve that vision.

That is why the concept of the proposed Behavioral Health Road Map Commission is so powerful. We need a formal, permanent structure that is closely tied to both the Legislature and the Oregon Health Authority, and that is expressly responsible for delivering a consistent, integrated system of behavioral health care. And, in developing this Commission’s membership, it will be essential to formally include consumers of mental health services as equal partners in the work -- if we want to deliver a system that truly meets peoples’ needs, consumer voice must be central to creating and holding us accountable to that vision.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Meieran