

Health Department

Date March 23, 2021
TO: The Honorable Sara Gelser, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health, and Recovery

SUBJECT: SB 680: Relating to residential peer support for individuals with mental illness who are in crisis

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee: My name is Julie Dodge. I am the Interim Director for the Behavioral Health Division at Multnomah County Health Department. Today I want to express my support for Senate Bill 680, which would provide funding to peer-run organizations to operate peer respite centers to provide peer respite services to those with mental illness who experience acute distress, anxiety or emotional pain.

Investments in the community mental health system over the past decades have tended to focus on crisis services and longer term residential care. While these investments have been important, it has left a "missing middle" in the continuum. Increasing services such as peer respite will help fill that gap, and provide a vital resource to those in need of short term stabilization. This bill would include critical peer respite services as part of the continuum of behavioral health care.

This legislation also reinforces the fact that our behavioral health system must be consumer-driven. At Multnomah County, we have infused peer voice operationally through our Office of Consumer Engagement and continue to interface regularly with our Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (BHAC). BHAC discussions have regularly focused on peer services. Our planning process for a Behavioral Health Resource Center, to be opened in summer/fall 2022, has been led by consumers and will be staffed by peers. We believe that peers can speak into the lives of individuals living with behavioral health challenges in a way that is effective, and builds relationships that sustain recovery. This bill aligns with recommendations from the BHAC, the Human Services Resources Institute (HSRI) Mental Health Analysis Report, and Multnomah County's legislative agenda to improve the Behavioral Health system.

Thank you for supporting this important piece of legislation.

Julie Dodge, DMin, LMSW
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Multnomah County Health Department