Caren Caldwell April 17, 2021 To Joint Committee Ways and Means Re SB 555 In support of HB 2417 and HB 3069

My name is Caren Caldwell. I live in Ashland. I have two adult sons who both have a mental illness. Both have interacted with police and been arrested. I have called the police myself when one of my sons was exhibiting psychotic behavior. Why? Because I couldn't find any other resource that would respond to him in a crisis.

So, imagine my how I felt when I read about the death of Matthew Graves at the hands of Eagle Point police in 2018. Graves was 35 and suffered from schizophrenia. He was killed by Eagle Point police after an officer saw him cross a street against a light and followed him into a restaurant bathroom.

According to the Ashland Tidings, "Graves was making statements that [the officer] should have recognized as consistent with mental illness." Eagle Point officers are trained yearly in crisis intervention. But, "rather than try to de-escalate the situation and get Graves to calm down, the officer shouted commands at him, demanding that he get on the ground."

Graves was shot twice in the back as he lay on the floor because the officer mistook his own dropped taser for what he thought was the victim's gun. The newspaper editorialized, ". . . this case should never have reached that point. The officers were never in danger. Graves was unarmed. The officer had no business pursuing a mentally ill jaywalker into a public restroom and aggressively confronting him."

Matthew Horace is a black cop and author of The Black and the Blue: A Cop Reveals the Crimes, Racism, and Injustice in America's Law Enforcement.

He writes, "... because America has failed to adequately provide care for the homeless and the mentally ill, every day the police find themselves on a collision course with people they are not trained to engage, often with disastrous results.

- "... in cop world, if people don't respond to our verbal commands, we're trained to apply force. But how can these people follow commands when their minds don't allow them to even adequately process the conversations and exchanges? In too many of these encounters, the result is death....
- "... On average, each day, one mentally ill or disabled person is killed by a law enforcement officer because these officers are being asked to do a job that they simply cannot and should not be assigned to do."

I want a Cahoots-type mobile crisis response program for our community that will be a non-police response to people in crisis. For this service to be effective it needs to be linked to other essential crisis resources—24/7 behavioral health hotlines and 24/7 walk-in crisis stabilization centers.

Two bills address this need: HB 2417, the CAHOOTS bill; and HB 3069, the 988 crisis line implementation bill.

I ask you to fund these programs because they will fill the significant gap in health services currently lacking in most of Oregon. They will improve the lives of people who cannot currently access behavioral health treatment when and where they need them. And, by replacing police with appropriately trained mental health workers, they will help decriminalize what are essentially mental health challenges.

Finally, funding the expansion of crisis services will save lives. That's I want for my loved ones.