

20 April 2021
House Committee on Rules

Ref: HCR 5

Chair Barbara Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs, and Committee Members,

I want to begin with a big thank you for giving me the space to share my voice in regard to this very important topic on hand. My name is Hanna Lilly, I'm 22, and have been a part of the amazing team of volunteers at YouthLine since I was 16. As you have (perhaps) already heard, YouthLine is a peer-to-peer crisis support line, a collection of young people like myself who work directly with youth experiencing any number of mental health crises. In the several years I have volunteered with YouthLine, I have spoken to thousands of young people, each bringing their own unique story, experience and hardship. No two conversations have ever been the same.

I have learned that mental health is complex, and in the context of intervention, it requires a careful response: a response full of care. Our current system places the weight of this care on the backs of law enforcement officers, many of which have received less training in mental health intervention than I did to become a volunteer at 16. The result of this mis-placement of care can be detrimental to those involved: incarceration, injury, and even death all being demonstrated results of our current practice.

It is time for us to re-imagine what this care can look like. HCR 5 would lay the groundwork for community-based mobile intervention services to be available for any and all residents of Oregon who are experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis. This has successfully been done before, with the CAHOOTS model, with the Support Team Assistance Response program in Denver, with many other community-based public safety systems.

I see the success of comprehensive mental health response every week on the YouthLine. Our volunteers are able to de-escalate high risk contacts 95% of the time, meaning no emergency services need to be called on the young person in crisis in order to ensure their safety. We sit with them, we listen, we hold their hurt with them on the phones, over text, over chat. We make a difference, simply by having a conversation.

So let's continue *this* conversation of how we can care for our communities in a safe and comprehensive way.

It is with gratitude and hope that I share this testimony with you today. Gratitude for the efforts pioneered by this committee to create a more just, more caring, and more comprehensive response to mental and behavioral health crises throughout our state. And hope, hope for a future wherein this resolution paves the way to a re-imagined system of justice wherein our neighbors, our loved ones, our communities are no longer punished for being in crisis. I believe in this future; it's the one I want to grow into.

Thank you.

Hanna Lilly
YouthLine Volunteer