

20 April 2021
House Committee on Rules

Ref: HCR 5

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this resolution. My name is Shannon Marble and I am here today to urge you to adopt HCR 5.

Six years ago, I became a student mental health advocate at my university after experiencing my own mental health crisis. My experience as a young adult advocate cultivated a passion that has shaped my career. Since graduating college over four years ago, I have worked in various positions with teens and young adults with lived experience of serious mental health challenges. One of my previous roles was as a youth peer support specialist for multi-system involved youth engaged in Wraparound Services in Clackamas County. Each of these youth had serious mental health challenges and many of the teens on my caseload were involved in the juvenile justice system and/or the Oregon Youth Authority.

Every single youth I worked with that was involved in the justice system was only involved in that system as a direct result of interactions they had with law enforcement during a mental health crisis. Each one of these young people became involved in these systems because they did not have access to the appropriate services they needed to cope with their mental health challenges. Our society has a lot less empathy for people when the symptoms of their mental illness look like threatening family members, substance use and distribution, risky sexual behaviors, running away from home, stealing things, or destroying property. In my experience, police are not properly trained or equipped to de-escalate these situations and the justice system is not set up to provide the mental health services needed for those experiencing mental health crises.

Mental illness is not a crime and people do not receive the mental health support they desperately need from juvenile detention centers, jails, or prisons. While working as a peer support specialist, I was also tasked with contacting law enforcement dispatch when someone I was working with was not able to keep themselves or others safe. This was never an easy decision to make. We have seen time and time again that law enforcement/criminal legal system is violent and does not inevitably bring safety to people. Data shows us that 1 in 4 people murdered by police are experiencing mental health crisis at the time they are murdered, and people unable to access mental health support are 16 times more likely to be fatally shot during an encounter with police. This is even more true for Black and Brown individuals. Criminalizing addiction and mental health are not within my values, but without adequate alternatives to law enforcement there is no other option.

I believe that if Oregon had behavioral health mobile crisis response teams available and accessible state-wide, the young people I worked with would have never gotten trapped by a justice system with inadequate mental health services and supports for those with serious mental health concerns. The possibilities HCR 5 could present gives me hope as a mental health professional that one day I will no longer need to call law enforcement for someone experiencing a mental health crisis and have the inevitable gut-wrenching feeling that I potentially made someone less safe by making that call. HCR 5 would allow Oregon to trailblaze a path that states around the nation could follow. It would allow us to develop systems and services that actually help people recover. We have an opportunity re-imagine community safety. We must get creative with safety planning outside of law enforcement if we truly want to begin "prevention", otherwise we are taking a band-aid approach and sending our fellow Oregonians back to the systems that have hurt them. For these reasons, I testify in support of HCR 5.

Thank you for your time,

Shannon Marble