

2/22/21

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong support for bill HB2417. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who recently moved to the valley, but I hold this stance based on years of working with young people with mental health and substance use challenges. Most people who are unhoused, struggling with mental illness or addictions are survivors of trauma and victimization themselves. They need support and the resources to heal and stabilize, rather than getting caught up in the justice system as criminals, or worse yet, killed due to an inappropriate police response to situations that would be better understood by mental health providers who utilize a trauma informed perspective.

I am writing this testimony in honor of Tony Robinson, an unarmed biracial teenager who was killed in my old neighborhood by police. His friends called the police because they were concerned that Tony was having a negative reaction to a drug, which caused him to act erratically. When the police arrived, they approached Tony as a violent criminal. He was shot and killed by the police who were called to help him. Had my town had a program like CAHOOTS in place, Tony would still be alive today, and if needed, he likely would have been connected to resources that could have helped him going forth. He would have been treated with compassion and understanding, and the pain of his loving family and the entire community could have been prevented.

As we all know, these situations happen all too often, and we need to be willing to be creative and bold to truly affect change. I believe that a CAHOOTS style crisis response team would help the valley become the compassionate and humane community that we strive to be. It would address a large percentage of the situations that police currently respond to, minimizing the chance of escalation and connecting people with appropriate systems. Over time, the CAHOOTS team would build trust with their consumers, which would de-escalate situations so they could be managed compassionately and effectively. We are lucky to be able to learn from a successful model in a city nearby. We have an opportunity in the valley to join this groundbreaking movement and be a model for other places in the country. I hope that we, as a community, make the investment to create a better world for all of our citizens.

Thank you for your consideration,
Kimberly Wasserman, LCSW