

I am a member of the board of the Oregon chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the world's oldest peace and social justice organization, established in 1916. We have partnered with the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice and the Western States Center in strong support of HB2417. Rather than repeat the comments of other speakers on this bill, I would like to draw your attention to a couple of areas that were not discussed or raised in testimony.

FOR has, since its founding, strongly supported finding solutions to problems without resorting to violence. It was founded after WWI as an organization committed to seeing that conflicts between could be settled peacefully. Thus, conflict resolution has been the core principle driving it since that time. For the past several years, OFOR has provided training to lay people who confront tense situations needing de-escalation. One of the things we have come to realize is that fear is the driving factor that results in violence. In police versus citizen confrontations, fear is expressed as escalating aggression by both sides.

I couldn't help notice that there were very few people of color among the legislators and speakers. That lack of adequate representation is reflected in the language of the bill itself. POCs have a different response to the presence of law enforcement in their neighborhoods than white people do. The same could be said for people with mental health issues. Their fear is amplified from the very beginning of their interaction with the police. The language of the bill should include a provision that responders to mental health crises be dressed appropriately in street clothing, and come on scene in unmarked, unofficial-looking vehicles in order to reduce the level of fear those in crisis are experiencing. Uniformed officers should leave the scene.

As a resident of Forest Grove, Oregon, I am familiar with how difficult it can be for small communities to find the resources needed to address all-too-common mental health issues faced by people who are often our friends and neighbors. Uniformed officers typically have neither the training, the time, nor the mindset to deal with those problems. Due to limited funds for policing and law enforcement training in small communities, rural police officers sometimes come from the ranks of city law enforcement officers who have been rejected by their previous departments for a variety of reasons. This bill offers a possible way to ameliorate lack of appropriate personnel for crisis intervention in rural communities.

Finally, the bill could also become a model for other states to follow. There are almost no regulations that have been issued at the state level in the US to address this important issue.

Thank you..