

February 24, 2021

Re: HB 2417 Relating to crisis intervention resources; declaring an emergency.

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

As a sibling to someone who experiences Schizophrenia, I am writing in support of HB 2417. Mental health crisis should warrant mental health care response. Police response to mental health crisis only perpetuates the stigma that those struggling with mental illness are dangerous. It's not a crime to have a mental illness.

When my brother was first diagnosed with Schizophrenia at the age of 18, he was well-aware of society's constructs that informed him he should be ashamed of his condition. Due to this, he forewent mental health care and suffered with the torment of symptoms.

In the early stages of his disease, my sister decided to call the police. She thought the police would see that he was in danger of hurting himself, would bring him to a hospital, and he would get the care he needed. Instead they arrived in multiple cars, with sirens blazing. My terrified and bewildered brother was tackled and handcuffed. An hour or so later, convinced he wasn't a threat, the police uncuffed him and drove off. This traumatic experience caused irreparable psychological damage and my brother became even more resolute in his refusal for care. This continued for a decade, until finally my brother reached a breaking point where he was "officially" deemed a risk to himself and was admitted to a mental health facility.

If a mental health mobile response team had showed up that day, it might not have taken ten years of him living in agony before he finally got the care he needed. The strength and resilience my brother demonstrates, by showing up every single day with this illness, is like no other feat I have witnessed in my life. The unfair challenge of living with a mental illness, is one of great magnitude. HB 2417 will support this vulnerable population and lead our society in taking a step towards erasing the stigma around mental illness. It will help those in need get the care they really necessitate and deserve. I urge the committee to support HB 2417. Thank you for your time in reading my testimony.

Sincerely,
Molly Kingsley Holzshu
Jackson County, Oregon