

Chair Sanchez, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2417. My name is Bethany Loberg. I live in Marion County and am currently the Co-Chair of the Board of the Oregon Fellowship of Reconciliation and a Member-Leader with Black Joy Oregon. I agree with those who testified this morning on the critical nature of having mental health professionals and not police respond to mental health crises.

I don't want us to have more cases like that of Saraya Rees, a 14 year old girl from Coos County, OR who ended up sentenced to 11 years in prison following a mental health incident in which her parents called the local crisis line for health and wellness for assistance. Rather than sending trained mental health professionals, Coos Health and Wellness called the Police, which Saraya's parents did not want or request. Saraya has a documented history of mental health struggles and regularly endured aggressive bullying at her school for being biracial. Saraya was on anti-depressants and received regular counseling. A local pediatrician (who was not her regular doctor) took her off her anti-depressants cold-turkey. Four days after this she went into a manic state of psychosis during the night. In her manic state she poured less than a square foot of gasoline on the floor of her living room. Her Stepfather woke up to find Saraya sitting on their living room floor in a daze. Knowing something seemed off, he woke her mother and they called for help. The DA determined that Saraya's parents were "victims" of Saraya's "planned arson". Saraya ended up being charged with murder and assault.

14-year-old Saraya remains incarcerated to this day without the mental health support she needs. The DA released a 7 page report that leaves out Saraya's documented struggles with mental illness prior to the incident as well as her mental state during the incident. More information about her case is available at <https://www.justice4saraya.com/>

It is also relevant to note that one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Khan-Cullors had a brother who struggled with mental illness. Witnessing the brutality the police treated him with, as well as the torture he experienced in prison as he was controlled rather than treated was one experience that shaped her call to defund the police and invest in other resources for creating community safety.

I believe HB 2417 is an important step in creating options apart from calling the police to address crises of mental health, homelessness, and poverty here in Oregon.

I want to close with a quote from a chapter titled "Creating Safety for Ourselves" in the book Colorizing Restorative Justice. The chapter is written by Johonna Turner, Professor of Restorative Justice at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, where I studied a masters in Conflict Transformation.

"#SayHerName. #SayHisName. #SayTheirNames. The spirits of Black and Brown people killed by police officers bear witness to police as a common source of danger rather than a prevailing source of protection within many of our communities. In some situations, calling the police even when we need help can result in greater violence—for example, the police murder of a loved one experiencing a mental health crisis or the deportation of an undocumented immigrant family. How can we secure our own safety given that government institutions for "keeping the peace" have never functioned for our safety, freedom, and self-determination? This question is not new, and our communities have been innovating answers for centuries. As people committed to a healing justice that resists oppression in all its forms, we inherit this legacy. And as with those before us, it is crucial that we not only rethink our journeys toward justice, but also reimagine our strategies for safety."

Thank you, and I urge you to pass HB2417.