

February 24, 2021

RE: Funding Mental Health

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing in support of HB 2417, providing funding for mobile crisis intervention. This is so needed on many counts. First of all, the nation made quite clear last summer that we need a new system rather than the frequent casualties by police due to handling mental health crises when they are instead trained for handling criminal crises. Mental health practitioners have the training to deal with mental health. We need funding for them to be the ones who show up to a mental health crisis. Secondly, we need funding for mental health in general. Oregon is a mental health desert. As a matter of fact, if you really want to use the money well, you would also provide funding next for OHP to pay for more private mental health treatment facilities and new methods on providing mental health treatment.

In April of 2016, my son-in-law was depressed with suicidal thoughts. The only option to get help on OHP was to go to a place called "Options" as a walk-in. They waited 4 hours!!! They finally had to leave to go pick up the kids. The next day they came and waited 5 hrs with the same result. The next day he killed himself.

Their kids (my grandkids) were 8 & 10. Now they are 13 & 15. The ability to get GOOD counseling for them has been an ordeal. Whether it was from insufficient counseling from their loss or from inherited traits, we'll never know, but my grandson is dealing with mental illness now. He has fits of rage that include throwing furniture and threatening his family and himself with harm. Three times this year we've had to call 911 and officers took him to the hospital. Because there is so little funding for mental health for kids, my daughter was told it would be weeks probably before he could leave the covid-infested hospital for a mental hospital to get help rather than containment. So she brought him home. Once I was caring for him and we went through the same ordeal. The officers were very nice but my grandson was out of it and tried to egg one on saying "You killed George Floyd" and calling him expletives. I could see the officer's hackles rising and told him "Don't engage. He's baiting you." He heard me and followed suit. But think of how often this does not go well!? My grandson has mental problems and needs help. But with the present system, it's only a matter of time before he's in juvenile hall after a poorly handled mental crisis.

PLEASE, out of compassion, or at least out of saving money on criminal justice, please pass HB 2417 for starters. You will undoubtedly save lives, and put your money to more efficient use.

Then, BE A LEADER and propose government funding for mental health facilities for youth. The only option for residential immersion in therapy for my grandson now is Trillium, which we've been told by several professionals would be a poor fit for him because it's filled with court-referred tough kids. If he could get good immersive therapy, I do believe we wouldn't need to call 911 any more for him. It's a good use of your money! Funding more private pay places

through OHP is a good start, but it's still only a partial remedy because the entire middle class doesn't get OHP and cannot afford residential treatment. I looked into wilderness therapy for my grandson. Helping fund these would be a good use of money because they have such a higher rate of success than regular mental hospitals, immersing the client in therapy. One bout of expensive 6 weeks of treatment is a lot cheaper than many bouts of cheap treatment that still don't cure the client. Please create government grants for 501c3's that provide scholarships for these, such as "Sky's the Limit". Or at least direct OHP to pay for 6 weeks of residential treatment in a variety of settings (wilderness, therapeutic "schools", clinical, etc.) AND in other states. You don't have much control over availability immediately (though funding will eventually change that), but OR does have control over whether existing programs OUT OF STATE are covered by OHP.

I know I've veered from HB2417, so I ask you to please forward this to whomever you think might want to see these ideas. PLEASE help Oregon not continue to drown in the fallout (crime, drugs, ...) from their lack of mental health coverage. Start with what's on the table: At least keep a mental health crisis from turning into a criminal crisis unnecessarily. Vote yes on HB 2417.

Thank you,

Bev Buswell
Ashland, OR