

To the House Committee on Behavior Health,

In the midst of a pandemic, decimating wildfires, and social justice upheaval, now more than ever, people are experiencing severe mental health crises, homelessness, and substance use issues. Jackson County is in dire need of reformed public safety for our intensifying amount of people in crisis. These are challenges that cannot be managed by law enforcement alone. That is why I am in support of HB 2417 that would aid in the development of a mobile crisis intervention program for the Rogue Valley.

I am a nursing student, and in this position, I have become increasingly aware of local community health issues during my time spent as a student at rehabilitation centers and at the hospital. Through observation and research I have come to realize there are drastic amounts of mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness in Jackson county. Our emergency departments and our jail are overcrowded with those very people experiencing crises. These interventions for them are not the solutions. The emergency department, police response, incarcerations, and ambulance are all extremely costly services that are not necessary for what these people need.

These vulnerable populations aforementioned need adequate crisis intervention with appropriate follow-up services and in the support and presence of mental health workers, social workers, and/or nurses. Programs like CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets) in Eugene, have seen major success in reducing arrests, de-escalating crises and connecting community members to social services by providing mobile crisis intervention. CAHOOTS has been successful in diverting thousands of calls away from police and emergency rooms, saving millions of dollars in medical and public safety costs and serving some of the most marginalized and alienated populations in their community. This model goes above and beyond what is currently offered in the Rogue Valley by providing services that are fully mobile, 24/7 and are run by qualified medical and mental health care providers, not law enforcement.

This kind of program could be adapted to meet our unique needs here in the Rogue Valley and would be a tremendous asset to our community. My hope is that HB 2417 will help to fund a CAHOOTS-modeled mobile crisis intervention program for Jackson county area.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A Jackson County Community Member and Nursing Student