



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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February 8, 2023

Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

SB 212 is an agency bill that helps put structure around peer support programs in the agency. This was driven by our Community Services parole and probation staff.

The work OYA staff do can be taxing, draining, and traumatic at times. We build personal connections with youth to hold them accountable and provide opportunities for growth and change, and yet we cannot solve their problems for them. They are released to their communities, experience the stresses in those communities. Traumatic events in their lives, even when no longer under the jurisdiction of the court, greatly impact our staff. In addition, our staff are community members, parents and family members. Life happens and at times it is exceptionally difficult to face the work, crisis in personal lives or both.

Peer Support Members provide crisis intervention intended to be a short-term helping process. We engage our peers with efforts to stabilize and mitigate a crisis response, and to help them foster a natural resiliency through:

1. Stabilization – help them to get a safe space (emotionally, physically or mentally), get back to familiar routine, meet their basic needs (cup of coffee, meal train, etc.).
2. Acknowledge the Crisis - help them reduce symptoms, engage them, find a quiet place to talk and listen and establish a social support.
3. Facilitate Understanding – acknowledge what they are feeling, their reaction is a normal response to the event.
4. Encourage Effective Coping Skills - self-care, being with family, talking to their pastor, etc.
5. Help facilitate access to continued care by referring to counseling if requested or needed.

SB 212 supports and helps create a peer support model in the following ways:

1. Best practice is for the employee to know and be assured that the meeting and discussion with the peer support member is completely private and cannot be used against them in discipline or litigation.
2. Staff need to feel comfortable so they can open up and use the peer support process more fully, this increases the level of trust in confidence in the process and ultimately the peer support member can be more effective.
3. There are required exemptions to the confidentiality provisions, including reporting child/elder abuse, threats of suicide or homicide, and reports of criminal conduct on OYA grounds or while conducting professional duties.

To help understand why, here are some examples of the type of circumstances that our staff have dealt with:

- There have been nine youth deaths in the community the last two years, between homicide, suicide, and overdose. (These are youth who are no longer on our caseloads as well as current youth).
- Youth who was very ill and, in the hospital, for extended periods of time.
- Supporting youth when the youth's family member is very ill or injured and, in the hospital.
- Family (specifically child) who has significant medical issue.
- Family death due to COVID or major illness.

Development of the Peer Support Program:

The program began to take its current form in Community Services, several years ago, after a youth overdose at program. Staff were supported by local supervisor and team, but it was a significant event for not just the assigned Juvenile Parole and Probation Officer (JPPO), but other OYA staff, and people were reaching out wondering how to help or support their colleagues. The idea was started from there – to have a team in place that can be intentional and proactive around supporting needs.

Two supervisors were working on it, then applied for and were awarded a grant from DPSST to form the structure, build and train a team. We now have 13 trained team members across all areas of community services. The procedures are in place and the team has been active in reaching out to and supporting team members. They have noticed as well that some employees are reaching out to them as well. We also have employee support structures in facility services.

Law enforcement officers have similar legal construct around peer support efforts in ORS 181A.835. As our staff do not have arrest powers, nor carry weapons, the issues we face can be similar, but also different. We wanted to embed this without our statutes.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,
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