

Submitter: Sally Reid

On Behalf of: Parent navigating the mental health system for over 15 years

Committee: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: **HB2541**

After years of navigating the mental health system in Oregon, I have found that the lack of housing for those who suffer from extreme mental health issues has contributed greatly to our growing homeless population. I call these new homeless camps our modern day "leprosy" camps illustrated in the Bible. Oregon needs to reevaluate the way they treat individuals suffering and have various housing options available for an individual when released from the hospital that meets their level of independence. Oregon lost many good residential care homes when they audited them and reduced their funding resulting in many closing down as they could no longer afford to operate. Covid took its toll also on several operators who actually died with covid due to the lack of support the state requirements placed on them.

Currently, an individual suffering is being released back to the street after short hospital stays due to police holds or attempts to have a civil commitment hearing to secure safe housing and treatment for these individuals. The local hospitals will no longer hold individuals suffering because of a pending law suit against the state hospital thus again, releasing them to the street if no residential program is available. Keep in mind, the requirements to get into these few residential treatment facilities requires a commitment to take medications which many of these individuals do not want to continue once released. Many are kicked out or not even accepted in if there was a gap in the time released from the hospital and a bed finally opening up. Giving them a bus ticket to a shelter (if available) or a hotel voucher is only contributing to the crazy cycle Oregon has created in treating our most vulnerable citizens.

Oregon needs to evaluate what other countries and other successful states are doing to help support those suffering not only from their own trauma, but the trauma our broken system has contributed to their lack of trust in those who are there to help them. There should be residential home settings; secure short term treatment facilities that allow for crisis interventions and support; farming communities for those who need a slower pace approach to wellness; and secure long term care facilities that truly work on the individual's specific trauma needs. When we approach healing in a cookie cutter model, the results will continue and individuals will not get the help they need and deserve.

Oregon tax payers deserve better support systems as the price tag on this current crazy making cycle isn't working. We have to do a better job of seeing those on the street and meeting them where they are. Our leprosy camps are a cry for help and an acknowledgement that what we are doing today is not working. Each of these individuals has a story and a family that is crying out for help for their loved ones. Let's not let another one die on the street hopeless for a future that they don't think they deserve or can accomplish without having a true home address to begin anew again.