

March 5, 2025

RE: Written Testimony for SB 3835

Dear Senate Committee Members,

I submit this written testimony for your consideration regarding SB3 835. I am expressing my support for SB 3835. This decision is based on our lived experience in trying to access community and residential support for my son who is dual diagnosed with co-occurring psychosis and an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD).

Realizing that this information will be made public, I share his experience and our family's experience both in a transparent manner while also protecting his privacy and dignity. Our son was living in our family home in Mount Angel where he grew up and we still reside until he became eligible for IDD services around 11 years old. At the time, we also had suspicions that there were co-occurring undiagnosed mental health needs that were not being addressed. For the last 3 years, he has officially been diagnosed with unspecified psychosis as well as his IDD determination.

When he was living at home, and he was in crisis, our only option was to call 911 and have him transported to the hospital only to be told that he will not be admitted – not even for observation. This pattern would repeat 2-3 times per week until he was admitted to a children's IDD group home in Salem. He was there about two years before a slot opened at Trillium Family Services' Farm Home in Corvallis. He was at the Farm Home for one year then transitioned to a state operated group home in the SACU system. He has aged out of the children's residential system and is now residing in a group home for adults with IDD.

We 'played-by-the-rules' in trying to navigate the system of care for dual diagnosed individuals but consistently ran into barriers and obstacles from either the medical profession, Oregon Health Authority or Oregon Developmental and Disabilities Services. Consistently we heard from the systems and professionals whose job it was to support him that they can address one of these areas but cannot address all three. In essence we were put in a position to choose what services he would have access to instead of looking at our son from a wholistic perspective and provide him the support and services he needs to teach him the skills that allow him to reach his full potential.

I can only imagine the stories that you have heard about from other families in similar situations. Our family is united with them in the frustrations of a lack of services to meet the needs of our highly vulnerable sons and daughters. Our journey's may be different in the fact that the residential placement at the Farm Home was a life saver for our family. Of course, we were heartbroken that our son was not at home, and we grieved that our dream of a 'typical' normal family was not going to happen. We were faced with an impossible choice of residential treatment for the safety of our son, the protection of his younger sister and my wife and me. We could not live in a healthy and safe manner having to call 911 every 72 hours only to be told to 'hang-in there' but Gabe can't be admitted. We could not support him staying at our home due to the manifestation of his co-occurring needs as well as the reality of a lack of services available in a community setting.

I will say with confidence that if we did not have access to residential support at the Farm Home and his various IDD group homes – we would have experienced vastly different outcomes than we have today. Without residential placements, he may have been in the criminal justice system or attempted a successful suicide. After visiting him on multiple occasions at his residential settings, our drives home would be filled with emotions and tears. Not because he was unsafe – just the opposite – because we were so frustrated that he had to put himself in danger to get him access to residential treatment and the level of support he requires. The staff at the Farm Home became his second family and ours as well. We never doubted that he was not taken care of in a loving, caring and professional manner.

In closing, it would be a travesty if employees of Residential facilities through simply doing their professional job duties, their career work, all with passion and empathy for individuals and their families were somehow connected to criminal behavior, endless investigations and possibly career ending outcomes. This is at the core of why I strongly encourage you to support SB 3835.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share some our family's experience and perspective with this committee. As policy makers we ask that you see our son's, daughters, nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters, grandchildren and friends beyond their diagnosis, their eligibility criteria or their funding streams and look at them as vibrant members of our community's that will flourish when provided with the right supports and services in place. Please reach out if you need additional information or have further questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joe James', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joe James (Gabe's Dad)

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