

Submitter: Josef Mendelsohn
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1583

On behalf of Bridges to Change, we submit this letter in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1583.

Bridges to Change works directly with people navigating substance use disorder, housing instability, trauma, and system involvement. From that vantage point, we know that stability, in services, funding, and administration, is essential to saving lives and supporting recovery. SB 1583 undermines that stability by moving Behavioral Health Resource Network (BHRN) funding out of the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and into the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC), reframing a public health program within a criminal justice structure.

The need for stability has never been greater. Moving the program yet again, particularly into an agency that does not administer behavioral health programs, risks service delays, provider attrition, and loss of community trust. SB 1583 also opens the door to diverting scarce treatment and recovery dollars into the criminal justice system. Allowing up to 15 percent of grant funds to be spent on administrative and law enforcement costs, and prioritizing strategies such as community courts and focused deterrence, shifts resources away from behavioral health care at a time when those resources are already shrinking. Oregon has separate funding streams for public safety and deflection; BHRN funds should remain dedicated to treatment, harm reduction, housing support, and peer-delivered care within the public health system.

Bridges to Change urges the legislature to reject SB 1583. The BHRN program does not need another structural overhaul. It needs stability, continuity, and the time to deliver on the promise of a public health response to substance use disorder.

Keeping the program within the Oregon Health Authority is essential to that goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Josef Mendelsohn

Bridges to Change