

March 25, 2017

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to you today in support of House Bill 3063, a bill that will provide incentive to fund all types of Mental Health Housing around the state. This issue is very close to my heart as I, and many of my friends, have children, siblings, or other family members who experience chronic mental illness. Chronic mental illness changes the world that you live in and, in many ways, creates hardships that others do not experience in all areas of one's life from relationships to employment to having permanent housing.

In Yamhill County, prior to the 2017 homeless count, there were approximately 1,200 identified homeless people in the county. Of course, that is only a portion of the true count, as many never present to be counted. Additionally, a portion of the homeless population is quite transient, and therefore difficult to count accurately. I have not yet heard the numbers from our 2017 count in January, however, I can't imagine our numbers have gone down. From the looks of our streets, I would guess that they have increased. Many of the individuals who are homeless also experience chronic mental illness. Many of them also self-medicate with substances, which successfully adds yet another layer of complications for individuals, service providers, the community justice system, and the community at large.

While Yamhill County has shelters, there are an insufficient number of beds to manage the number of homeless individuals. Additionally, many shelters come with significant barriers. Those barriers come in the form of "rules" related to pets, substance use, previous experience, disqualifying behaviors, length of stay, desired demographic population, and pure numbers of available beds. The long-term shelters that exist create even more barriers, and most require one to have a clean UA in order to be accepted. In our county, even the Clean and Sober housing facilities create significant barriers for individuals who also experience chronic mental illness as you cannot reside in those facilities, in Yamhill County, while taking mental health medications. That leaves individuals who are working to stay clean and sober a very poor choice – take your medication to stabilize yourself and be homeless, or don't take your medication and have housing until you destabilize sufficiently to be evicted.

An additional difficulty that we are experiencing in Yamhill County, and I imagine is happening in other parts of the state as well, is with increasing numbers landlords are issuing no-cause evictions to their entire clientele citing renovation as the reason. We all know that this means, will re-open with significantly higher rental rates. This practice is displacing individuals and families at breakneck speed, thus successfully increasing the ever-growing number of homeless population. Even if people have sufficient income to rent elsewhere, the availability of property does not match the need, leaving people without options. Individuals with chronic mental illness often have diminished income to begin with, many have little to no income.

Yamhill County does have some mental health specific housing which is managed by county mental health. Again, the availability is significantly below the need. I was recently told by the housing coordinator, that for every housing voucher received from the housing authority, he has at least 45 qualified recipients to choose from, all of whom experience chronic mental illness. Rental assistance programs exist where qualified individuals pay 30% of their income, however, they are limited and individuals must find their own housing and be accepted by the property management company or landlord. Needless to say, housing is a significant issue in our county, which often becomes insurmountable if you add complications such as a previous eviction, a criminal history, or chronic mental illness.

Let me know share with you my personal story. Both my children, who are now young adults, and one of my sisters experience chronic mental illness. My sister, who lives in Multnomah County, has been evicted more times than I care to count due to her significant mental illness. She is physically disabled, having had a leg

amputated, and has been homeless this time for the last two (2) years. With multiple evictions, she is likely to continue to be homeless until she dies. She has lived a sad and tortured life, with death as her only hope out.

My beautiful young daughter is 28 years old. She experiences significant mental illness issues which cause her to have dysregulated emotions, altered perceptions, impaired judgment, often inaccurate emotions for the situation, high anxiety, post-traumatic stress, varying degrees of paranoia and suicidality. She often self-medicates with substances to calm her anxiety and dysregulated emotional states. A few years ago, she became involved with a man who has extreme anger issues and significant criminality. He is well known to our criminal justice system and just reading his rap sheet causes one to shiver. He is violent and aggressive. Three (3) years ago he shattered her right arm in an assault. She required \$10,000 worth of titanium, surgery, and significant rehab to create a usable arm again, although, it will never be the same. He was not convicted, mostly because of her mental illness issues, and she re-coupled with him after the trial. The assaults continued. As with many domestically violent relationships, control and isolation are primary tools. She was not allowed to work, go to school, go out and meet other people, or see her family without violent reprisal. Last Thanksgiving he assaulted her so badly that the neighbors, who were accustomed to the domestic violence, called the police. He fled and was later arrested again and she was then on her own. This not only significantly destabilized her, but, created a significant financial hardship. She was able to gain sufficient stability to begin looking for work and was able to obtain a seasonal position at a retail store, nine (9) hours per week. That was insufficient income to keep her afloat and she was subsequently evicted because she couldn't pay the rent. Eviction, in and of itself, is a demeaning process yet when you are already unstable, it is debilitating. She had ten (10) days to remove herself and her belongings. We were able to get her and some of her belongings out of the apartment by the deadline. Now, one might think the obvious solution would be to get another job, or two. While that is a viable and certainly reasonable thought, it becomes null and void once one becomes homeless. Without an address, employers are not interested as they can readily see the difficulties that could present to them.

My daughter is a single female with no children. The women's shelter in this county has not accepted a single female without children in the last 18 months. She has not been accepted at any of the long-term shelters. While she is on the housing list for the county, there are far more applicants than available vouchers. She does not drive in a county with very limited bus service, so that further compromises employment. While she was able to keep her seasonal job, her hours have been reduced to about six (6) hours per week. I have encouraged her to maintain that employment as that might help her secure other employment. Without a current job or address, she will have no hope of securing anything. She has a some job interviews, however, has consistently been turned down because she does not have a permanent address and is reliant on limited bus service or family and friends to get her to and from work. Her future looks bleaker by the day.

Homelessness creates a vortex that is encapsulating and very difficult to emerge from, even if you really want to. This vortex strips you of your hope, which further compromises one's future. Add chronic mental illness to that, and one can understand the level of despair people reach, which further adds to their destabilization. It is a viscous cycle! Housing is the solution to many of our current social wounds. If people have the dignity of stable, secure housing, then they are able to enjoy the benefits of employment, socialization, regular food, and restorative sleep; which allow them to be successful participating members of communities.

Please help my children, my sister, and all the other individuals who experience mental illness by giving House Bill 3063 your full support, thus creating funding for viable housing options for them to access.

Pauline Metoxen
811 Sitka Ave
Newberg, OR 97132
503-537-6221