



Co-chairs Nosse and Beyer and members of the committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to share this story with you and provide support for the Behavioral Health Services funding increases in the OHA Budget.

As you likely know, Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents a wide range of workforces – across the board whether it is our members in behavioral health, at the State Hospital, at OHSU, or in public safety, law enforcement, public defense or in a DA’s office they are all saying our behavioral health services are inadequate for meeting the need and they see the same people cycling through the system. Something they see as inhumane and costly for all of us and especially for those stuck in the cycle.

I want to talk a little bit about one example. A client of one of our public defenders, Charlie, gave him permission to talk about her story a little. I’ll call her “Kelly.” Kelly is a survivor of a shockingly traumatic childhood. She developed symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress and bi-polar disorder. But she made it through technical school and maintained a job and a home. She’s grown now, and has an adult child. A few years ago, her mental health started slipping. Her apartment was the first thing she lost - her neighbors were uncomfortable, and probably afraid. She had an altercation with a stranger and was charged with assault. The charge was the last straw, and she was kicked out.

Since then Kelly has struggled. The closest she got to stable housing was in inpatient mental health treatment, but since she completed that treatment in early 2018 she’s been on the street. Like a lot of women with histories of trauma, shelters are terrifying. Like a lot of people with serious mental health symptoms, they get into inexplicable altercations with strangers. Kelly was arrested five times last year, and was the victim in at least two assaults involving weapons, in incidents that never would have happened if she were getting the help she needs and if she weren’t on the street. Kelly’s problems are all of ours, now, because we don’t have the services to meet her needs and too many others like her.

Charlie had over 500 cases opened last year and with the statistics reported last summer in the Oregonian that 53% of the arrests in Portland last year were people who were experiencing homelessness, you can imagine Kelly isn’t the only one in his caseload that would benefit from access to critical, stable behavioral health and wrap around services.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 asks that you do all you can to invest in behavioral health and other critical health and human services.

Respectfully submitted by Eva Rippeteau, political coordinator, Oregon AFSCME Council 75