



**To: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee**

**From: Sheriff Jason Myers, Marion County Sheriff's Office**  
Oregon State Sheriffs' Association

**Date: March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Re: Support for SB 763 – Civil Commitment**

**Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee,**

For the record, my name is Jason Myers and I am the Marion County Sheriff. I'm here today testifying in support of Senate Bill 763 on behalf of the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association and Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police.

I'd like to begin my comments by first thanking Chair Prozanski and the Honorable Judge Wolke for their leadership and efforts in bringing together the Workgroup to decriminalize mental illness. This bill is a result of recommendations that came from this Workgroup which met multiple times over the course of the last 18 months.

Members of the community often ask me this question, "what is the biggest public safety issues facing our community." Without hesitation I tell them, mental illness, addiction or combination of both are the issues that utilize most of the resources our public safety systems have to offer. While our public safety system is intended to protect the members of our community, it was never designed to address individuals with chronic and persistent mental illness or addiction issues. Unfortunately, the criminal justice system has become our de facto mental health and addiction treatment system. Research has shown that arresting, incarcerating and repeating this cycle makes an individual with these conditions worse, not better.

In 1990, when I began my career in Law Enforcement, the bar for civil commitment was lower. If you had probable cause to believe a person was a danger to themselves or others, you could take the person into custody and get them the help they truly needed. Since that time the civil commitment bar has been raised so high that the individual must take an active step toward being a danger to self or others. This active step most often is behavior where the individual harms themselves or another person and ends with the individual entering the criminal justice system with criminal charges. I believe this is one of the reasons we have seen the Aid and Assist population dramatically increase, as these individuals are very ill and cannot aid in their own defense.

I believe that an upstream approach is a must for this population and the situation we find ourselves in. While community based behavioral services are badly needed in every community, this bill would make minor changes to the definition of danger to self or others that would lower the bar for civil commitment and enhance access to services for those who truly need it. Every community across our state would benefit positively from this change, but in our frontier and rural communities it would be game changer as they struggle with providing any mental health services. It is important to note, that this change must include greater access to treatment beds for those who are being committed. This is an issue currently statewide and is the number one issue in our rural and frontier counties.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the collective support from the Sheriffs and Police Chiefs Associations' for SB763. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you for supporting this important measure and for the opportunity testify today.