

Chair Prozanski and members of the committee:

My name is Darlene Brooks and I live in Roseburg. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of SB 187. I am a care giver for my severely mentally ill adult son, and I have been an advocate for severely mentally ill individuals and their family members for many years. As a local volunteer for the National Alliance on Illness of Douglas County, I frequently take calls from people in crisis. I have the privilege of sitting on the staffing for the Douglas County Mental Health Court. I have done this since the inception of the court here in Douglas County.

In our small community, there are few resources for people to get help when a loved one is in a mental health crisis. I've worked with many families in crisis over the years with adult children whose illness has absolutely caused them to be a danger to themselves or others, yet the bar to get those individuals into treatment is subjective and in my opinion far too high.

Several have complained to me about not having calls returned from the local mental health departments. For many, it becomes a vicious cycle of an act of violence being committed, the family having to call law enforcement, the ill individual being arrested or hospitalized, and then discharged (often with a criminal charge) to the street.

It should not be the role of law enforcement to be the de facto responders to a person in psychosis or in a mental health crisis, yet this is a pattern we continue to see here in Douglas County.

I have seen cases where people who are actively in psychosis have been arrested or taken to a hospital and then released without their families and loved ones being contacted. I know personally of at least two people who died after such incidents; one froze to death and one was tasered during an altercation with law enforcement and subsequently died. Our community has seen other deaths in the last few years under similar circumstances, although I did not personally know the individuals.

One is too many.

The bar is simply too high.

I want those with severe mental illness to have a safe environment that includes housing, adequate nutrition, and medication support and monitoring WITHOUT demanding that their families house and care for them when these families do not have the ability to keep themselves, or their loved ones, safe.

One story comes to mind where a local group paid for a motel room for someone in crisis because it was cold and rainy. The individual in the motel smeared feces all over the walls and broke the toilet. The parents were called and they picked him up and allowed the son to come to their home. They called a couple of days later and told me he had done the same thing in their home. They had tried and tried to get him committed or into a mental health protected environment for him, but were told he "was not sick enough" to qualify for civil commitment.

I ask your support for these families and individuals. These “unpaid, in-home care providers” must have access to information and resources to assist in care. Lives are at stake.

Please support SB 187.