



Oregon AFSCME Council 75 Supports SB 680

March 23, 2021

Dear Chair Gelser, Vice-chair Anderson and members of the Committee,

Thank you, for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 680. My name is Hannah Sloane-Barton, I am a newly hired Organizer for Oregon AFSCME Council 75 but most recently worked in residential treatment services. Oregon AFSCME represents more than 24,000 employees in Oregon including many in behavioral health services - peer support specialists and counselors at counties and nonprofits and the Drs and Nurses at the Oregon State Hospital. We also represent employees in other workforces that intersect with our behavioral health system such as public defenders, and others in public safety.

These members all know and often point to the growing need for services that keep the people they work with out of the criminal justice system and in more appropriate settings to deal with mental health and substance use issues. They all say that too many people they are supporting, representing in court, or ending up being housed in our jails and prisons are there because there are not enough mental health supports in the community. If the inhumanity of the lack of services and supports for people experiencing a mental health crisis doesn't move you, the inefficiency, strain and costs on our other services should.

Oregon AFSCME supports SB 680 as a step toward providing these much needed services. We also know that these critically needed services also need adequate financial support to ensure that a quality peer support workforce can be hired and sustained. Having recently worked in the field and with co-workers who were peer support specialist, I know how deeply personal and challenging the work can be. I also know many in peer support may have limited options due to the lived experiences that make them such a valuable part of treatment teams. Sadly, the combination of the high stress and low pay and for some, limited options, can lead to work environments that lean too heavily on that deeply personal connection to the work. Oregon AFSCME asks that you not only pass SB 680 for these critically needed service to but also the peer respite centers are also funded for appropriate workforce supports and protections that would support keeping people in the work.

Please pass SB 680.

Respectfully submitted by Eva Rippeteau, Political Coordinator, Oregon AFSCME Council 75,
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