



Sharon Meieran

Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1

To: House Committee On Behavioral Health
From: Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County Commissioner
Date: February 17, 2021
Re: Support for House Bill 2980

Chair Sanchez, Vice Chairs Moore-Green and Nosse, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sharon Meieran, I'm a Multnomah County Commissioner and a practicing emergency physician, and I am very pleased to offer testimony in support of House Bill 2980. Two years ago, I testified in favor of a similar bill because the need for peer-delivered respite, crisis prevention and support services was clear and urgent. Since then the need has only grown, and the evidence in support of these services has become more compelling. I'm proud to advocate again for these important services.

When I came into office a little over four years ago, my top priority was to improve our behavioral health care system. This was driven, in part, by my experiences in the emergency room -- I cannot think of a single shift I have ever worked where I do not see at least one person who is in the ER because of a mental health crisis. We know that the emergency department is one of the least effective, most expensive and traumatizing places to meet a person's mental health care needs and yet, we continue to see people come to the hospital because there often isn't an earlier intervention or support available.

Peer-delivered respite, crisis prevention, and support services are an evidence-based, cost-effective, smart alternative to the clinical and crisis-oriented services we more frequently invest in. Peer-staffed crisis respite is *proven* to reduce rates of Medicaid-funded hospitalizations and health expenditures for people who access the respite.¹ We should consider these kinds of services an essential part of our system of care that make other services more effective.

While my focus on mental health was first sparked by my experiences in the ER, what keeps this a top priority for me now is the passion and voice of people with lived experience. Consumers, peers, and advocates have told us for years what they need, and I think our serious consideration of funding more peer-delivered services today is a reflection of that powerful work. This issue and need is not unique to Multnomah County, and I am particularly supportive of this bill's direction to support peer respite in several communities across the state.

As a policy-maker, I am committed to listening to people with lived experience and weighing that perspective with other sources of evidence. The case for peer respite is a compelling one, and I am proud to lend my strong support for House Bill 2980.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Meieran

¹ Bouchery, E., et al. (2018) The Effectiveness of a Peer-Staffed Crisis Respite Program as an Alternative to Hospitalization. *Psychiatric Services*, 69:10.