

To the OR House Committee on Behavioral Health,

I strongly urge support of HB 2417 to expand CAHOOTS programs to more cities in Oregon.

As a regular volunteer with Southern Oregon Coalition for Racial Equity serving meals and providing other mutual aid for homeless folks in the area, I've seen a number of situations where having a mental health professional on hand would have resulted in a safer, more positive outcome both for the individuals in need and our community.

However, for mental health crises the go-to solution is to call the police. One woman I worked with for an afternoon was experiencing a dissociative episode. Later, I learned that she had been arrested when police came to sweep the encampment she was living in. I can say with certainty that that would have been traumatic for her: she would not have been in a mental state to understand what was happening or how to protect herself, and she wasn't connected with the level of care that her situation required.

We have great evidence in Eugene that this program reduces the need to bring a forced compliance model to mental health crises where that model regularly both fails to address the issue and makes everyone involved less safe. We've heard appreciation from law enforcement for how it leaves law enforcement more free to pursue criminal matters instead of being a catch-all solution for all community service needs. And we've seen arrests go down when we can get people connected with the appropriate service on the front-end.

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