

February 24, 2021

The House Committee on Behavioral Health-

RE: In Favor of HB 2417

The safety of the public should always be considered first.

Whatever measures we can take to reduce the risk for accidental violence or disproportional incarceration, we should do so for the public good. This is especially true the program implemented results in multiple benefits.

The statistics related to CAHOOTS, which we have had over 30 years to study, bear out the fact that this crisis intervention team (CIT) program reduces risk and increases public safety. The Eugene Police Crime Analysis Unit's August 2020 report showed that in 2019, CAHOOTS-only dispatches (where no law enforcement backup was called) numbered nearly 18 thousand. This program is estimated to have saved the Eugene Police between 5 and 8 percent of their workload. Out of the almost-14,000 calls where a team arrived at the scene, police backup was called only 311 times, or about 2 percent of calls. Each time a CAHOOTS call was answered, public trust was fortified by competent crisis intervention teams, with police assistance always available if needed.

In addition to risk reduction, harm reduction, and reduced police workload, the program also saves the Eugene-Springfield-Lane County taxpayers between an estimated 8.5 and 15 million dollars per year, while costing approximately only 2.1 million dollars. Any argument to be made against the CAHOOTS model must hold up against this data.

If the data has not convinced you, the author of the Eugene Police Department program analysis states, "CAHOOTS is a valued partner within the city of Eugene and provides a needed service within the community. In examining interplay between EPD and CAHOOTS, they are partner organizations where they both meet specific and unique needs."

We need police to be able to do their jobs and protect our community, but in too many instances they are being asked to serve in the role of social worker and mental health provider, which isn't what their training is focused on. No 40 hours of required police training will enable a police officer to react with the same instincts as a certified or licensed counselor and an EMT. We need the police to be able to protect our community. We each have our roles to fill. This program is something that is desperately needed in Southern Oregon. When I committed to representing the people of Medford as a City Councilor, I told constituents that I would work to have a program like CAHOOTS brought here to Jackson County.

The passage of this bill will assist communities like mine in investing in a cost saving program that not only helps us economically when we're struggling most but also saves lives. Substance

abuse disorders and mental health crises are not criminal acts. I urge you to support House Bill 2417. Investing in a program like this will benefit not only our local law enforcement and municipal budgets, but each member of our community, especially those suffering from a mental health crisis or substance use disorder.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Sarah Spansail