



## AFSCME Support for HB 2417

February 24, 2021

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2417, to create more mobile crisis response units in the state and expand existing programs.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents around 24,000 members in public and private employment settings, all in some form of public service to the people of Oregon. Our membership includes a growing number of employees in behavior health and substance use services and supports. We also represent members in public defense, public safety, housing and other health and human services. Across these sectors our member all acknowledge that they are seeing the same people rotating through the system largely due to the inadequate services that would better address issues of mental health, substance use or abuse and the need for stable housing than sending them to jail or prison. We know that lack of services and supports combined with our approach of responding to a mental health or behavioral health incidents as a crimes instead of a health care need greatly contributes to this inhumane and expensive public safety system.

There are many stories that members have shared about the people they work with and how the current criminalization of mental illness especially when combined with a lack of stable, or any housing has them landing in jail where they lose access to their medications, or sweeps of their camp causes them to lose important paperwork, or even how being on the street concerned about physical safety worsens their mental and behavioral health. When your work is to build trust with a person so that you can adequately represent them in court, or work with them to find housing or other supports, or help them get onto a path of recovery it is much harder to gain that trust when as a whole we've treated that person as a criminal and lesser than others.

The mobile crisis teams that could be created or expanded through the passage and funding of HB 2417 are an important step in making sure we treat people's mental health crisis as a health and human service need instead of a crime. It is an important step to shift away from



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overcrowding our jails and prisons with people best served with treatment services and housing supports. It is an important step in rebuilding trust and letting people who have long been marginalized know that we care and know they we should help them, not punish them. And of course it isn't the only step to address the need to rethink how we address issues in our communities and end practices that further racial and economic disparities.

AFSCME supports the passage and funding of HB 2417 and we look forward to working with this committee and the legislature as a whole on the other legislation that would further support the people being served by the crisis response teams through out the behavioral health and human services sectors.

Thank you for your work.

Respectfully,

Eva Rippeteau  
Political Coordinator  
Oregon AFSCME Council 75  
[erippeteau@oregonafscme.org](mailto:erippeteau@oregonafscme.org)