

I was signed up to testify yesterday at the hearing on House Bill 2417. Although my name was not called, I was content to yield the floor to the practitioners, clinicians, and persons in recovery who spoke compellingly about the importance of supporting this bill. I offer this written testimony now.

I am a mental health advocate, a civil rights attorney, and a member of the Salem City Council. I submit my testimony my personal capacity only. Just like the people who testified yesterday from places like Brookings and Medford, my own city is grappling with a lack of mental health services and homelessness.

When I started bringing up the idea of a mobile response unit in Salem, I expected to receive (and did receive) the support of mental health advocates, non-profits, and homeless advocates. But there was another group, one I did not expect, who voiced their support: Hoteliers, shopkeepers, restaurateurs, bartenders, baristas and other members of the downtown business community. As one barista explained, he was unwilling to call the police to deal with a transient, but he would have immediately called a mobile response unit to respond to their property. Business owners want first responders who are trained to deescalate, provide treatment, offer services, and transport as needed to a place of safety.

Law-enforcement is a critical component of public safety, but they cannot be our only option. We need the right tool for the right job. Oregon has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation. And so long as Oregon lags in mental health services, the need for a mobile response unit will be absolutely critical. I urge your support of House Bill 2417.