



Sharon Meieran  
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1

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February 15, 2023

Senator Patterson, Chair  
Senate Committee on Healthcare  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 514 - Relating to Adult Suicide Prevention

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Senator Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sharon Meieran. I am a Multnomah County Commissioner, a practicing emergency physician and a mom. I am writing in strong support of SB 514.

As an emergency physician working on the front line of our healthcare system, I see firsthand the mental health of our community pushed beyond a crisis point. Almost ten years ago I wrote an op-ed published in the Oregonian about the horrific state of our mental health system, focusing on the barbaric treatment of individuals in crisis in our emergency rooms. And since then our system has only gotten worse. **Suicide is the leading cause of death for Oregon youth ages 10-24.** It is the second leading cause of death for Oregonians ages 10-44. One Oregon county, Lane County, has a suicide rate that is **65% higher than the national average.** And this is the tip of the iceberg. It does not account for individuals who are suffering, who are contemplating harming themselves, who suffer from severe depression or other serious mental illness. People on the brink of taking the devastating step of trying to kill themselves.

As a County Commissioner, I am a member of our Local Mental Health Authority, which is tasked with coordinating our local system of mental health care. We are the front line of government, responsible for implementing state policies and using the resources provided by the state legislature. And we are seeing increases in the acuity of mental illness, substance use disorder and need throughout the spectrum of services we provide, without the resources or structure to address the ever-growing need. I am also a member of our Local Public Health Authority, and recognizing that suicide is a leading cause of death in our region and state, we have an obligation to take action to intervene.

I am grateful for the state prioritizing investment in behavioral health services. Having been a physician and mental health advocate far longer than I have been an elected official, I appreciate the recognition of the profound need for a system of effective behavioral health care, with the structures and accountability in place to support such a system.



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But, investments are only part of the equation. We need to follow through on our commitment to actually deliver the services that will save lives. SB 514 is crucial to this commitment. It will not only ensure that we will adopt and maintain a statewide strategic plan to prevent adult suicide, it will also make sure that those with lived experience are at the table.

The presence of people providing this insight is critical to informing planning. In my roles as doctor and policy maker, I have recognized over years that this perspective is invaluable. Without people with lived experience being part of planning and decision-making, the best intentions and well-crafted policies will simply not succeed, because they will not integrate the understanding of how those policies will actually play out in terms of impact on real people.

I deeply appreciate your taking the time to consider my testimony, and I urge you to support SB 514.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharon Meieran