

March 3rd, 2023

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

RE: SB 432-1 - Relating to the Oregon Behavioral Health Consumer Engagement Act

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee,

I'm Sharon Meieran. I am a Multnomah County Commissioner and a practicing emergency room doctor. I'm here to testify in strong support of SB 432-1. I have been on any number of the committees Mr. Fitts just described with the same people. There are too many reports to quantify

Oregon's counties serve as our regions' Local Mental Health Authorities. We are your partners on the front line, responsible for implementing the behavioral health policies you enact at the state. And as we all know, we are beyond a crisis point in terms of access to a functioning behavioral healthcare system in Oregon.

As a County Commissioner, I have seen well-intentioned and extremely well-funded policies fail at the implementation stage because at one extreme, they do not incorporate the expertise of people impacted by the policies in making key policy decisions. At the other extreme, they rely on the input of consumers to the exclusion of all else, without providing actual technical support, guidance, or structure. We have recently seen the devastating consequences of this extreme with the disastrous rollout of Measure 110.

As an ER doctor, I see the impact of failed policies up close, and it translates into astronomical healthcare costs and immeasurable human suffering. People trying to navigate a nonexistent system of behavioral healthcare, with no support, end up in crisis, often boarding in ERs for days or even weeks because there is nowhere for them to go and policymakers have not put together a plan that works in the real world.

SB 432-1 offers a common sense approach that can have an outsize and dramatic impact in terms of how policies are developed and function in the context of our existing broken behavioral health system. And it can help get us to our future state, with consumers being intimately involved in creating an effective and holistic behavioral health system that is accessible, affordable and available to all.

At the policy level, involving consumers at the decision-making stage will ensure that money, time and energy is not wasted in passing policies that are destined to fail down the road because they do not meet the needs of real people in the real world. Technical support and guidance can allow consumer advisory bodies to translate their recommendations into functional operations.



**Sharon Meieran**  
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1

501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600, Portland, Oregon 97214  
Phone: (503) 988-5220 | Email: [district1@multco.us](mailto:district1@multco.us)

At the individual level, Senate Bill 432-1 will offer a stable, ongoing, and nimble source of support, training, and outreach to over 250,000 people across the state who need and use behavioral health services. This will enhance their recovery and resilience, improve their access to effective resources and care, and hopefully translate into thousands less people falling through a nonexistent safety net and needing my services in the ER. I urge you to support SB 432-1, a critical measure to ensure that the Legislature's tremendous investments in behavioral health are used to their best effect and not wasted.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharon Meieran