

Mental Health Association of Portland

March 29, 2023

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, other members, for the record, my name is Jason Renaud. I am the secretary of the Mental Health Association of Portland and a member of the Mental Health Alliance. Both advocacy groups seek to improve the lives of people with mental illness and addiction in our State.

We were privileged to have worked closely with the Chief Sponsors on this legislation, and urge this committee to pass it as introduced.

Our support for SB 915 springs from our long concern with institutional harm to people with mental illness and addiction. In Oregon, most people on whom police use deadly force are in some sort of psychiatric crisis or have acute addiction. Since 1970, about 85% of those killed by the Portland Police Bureau were in some sort of crisis - caused either by untreated mental illness or addiction. You probably know 2022 set records in both Portland and Oregon as a whole for the number of people killed by police officers.

A couple of years ago in preparation of an article, I wrote the DAs in the state and asked: had your office, in memory, fully prosecuted any law enforcement officer for use of deadly force. Their answer was no. We know from records checks in Multnomah County the last such conviction was in 1969.

And yet in civil courts, localities face lawsuits for negligence resulting from deadly force by law enforcement. Those suits rarely go to trial - but are settled at great cost to the taxpayer. In preparation for this bill we asked plaintiff's attorneys - those who sue localities for negligence in civil courts - what makes a case attractive to them? Their answer: they look for a mistake in the investigation. They look for a lack of consistent, knowledgeable preparation of the case by prosecutors. All too often, they find it.

This risk points to a need for Oregon to invest in professionalism and genuine independence in the criminal side of deadly force cases. SB 915 moves us in this direction. With additional state funding, the Oregon DOJ can build expertise and capacity to take on these often extremely complex prosecutions - remarkably, benefiting everyone at the table.

Police officers and local governments both deserve competent, thorough prosecutions that do not drag on and result in civil litigation. District attorneys deserve support on these critical cases which challenge working relationships, sap resources, and draw

public scrutiny.

And of course people with mental illness and addiction, those 85% of people killed by police, deserve consistency and professionalism from those investigating and prosecuting their deaths.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Jason Renaud
Mental Health Association of Portland
info@mentalhealthportland.org
503-367-6128
www.mentalhealthportland.org