

Submitter: Aaron Douglas
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2467

Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature,

I write to you today in unwavering support of House Bill 2467, a measure poised to redefine our approach to mental health crises in Oregon. This legislation seeks to refine the definitions of “dangerous to self” and “dangerous to others” within the context of civil commitment, thereby enabling timely and appropriate interventions for individuals in dire need.

The Intersection of Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System

Oregon’s current landscape reveals a troubling entanglement between mental health issues and the criminal justice system. Individuals with frequent criminal justice involvement (FCJI) are 75% more likely to have a mental health diagnosis and 650% more likely to have a substance use disorder compared to their non-FCJI counterparts. Furthermore, they are 150% more likely to visit the emergency department.

These statistics underscore a systemic failure: our jails and prisons have inadvertently become de facto mental health institutions. As Washington County District Attorney Kevin Barton aptly stated, “We have allowed the criminal justice system to become the mental health care system. That is foolish and does not make sense.”

The Imperative for Preventative Intervention

The data paints a stark picture of the consequences of inaction. In 2023, Multnomah County reported a record 456 homeless deaths, with 282 resulting from unintentional drug overdoses. Fentanyl was a significant contributor in 89% of these cases.

Moreover, individuals with FCJI accounted for 29% of all jail bookings, despite representing only 9% of the Medicaid-enrolled population.

These figures underscore the pressing necessity for mechanisms that facilitate intervention before individuals encounter a crisis that escalates into criminal activity or self-harm.

HB 2467: A Step Toward Restorative Justice and Public Safety

By clarifying the criteria for civil commitment, HB 2467 empowers families and mental health professionals to act decisively and compassionately. This proactive approach aims to provide individuals with the care they need before they become enmeshed in

the criminal justice system, thereby preserving their dignity and autonomy.

Furthermore, this bill acknowledges the broader societal impact of untreated mental illness and addiction. Communities across Oregon are grappling with the ramifications, from increased emergency service utilization to public safety concerns. HB 2467 offers a balanced solution that respects individual rights while addressing the collective well-being of our neighborhoods.

The passage of HB 2467 represents a pivotal moment for Oregon—a chance to realign our mental health and criminal justice systems with principles of compassion, efficacy, and justice. By supporting this bill, we take a significant step toward a future where mental health crises are met with care and intervention rather than incarceration.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 2467 for the betterment of individuals in crisis, their families, and the broader Oregon community.

Aaron Kirk Douglas

Sources:

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