

Submitter: Veronica Gallegos Lozano
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2467

Dear Oregon Legislature,

My name is Veronica Gallegos Lozano and I am asking that you SUPPORT HB 2467. I write to you today hoping that I can find the words to convey the gravity of harm, despair and moral injury that Oregon's strict civil commitment laws have had on severely mentally ill individuals, their loved ones who seek help on their behalf and those who dedicate their lives trying to help those in crisis, only to be handcuffed to provide them the help they need due to our state laws.

I have worked as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker for almost 28 years, primarily working with those with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness and Addiction issues. I have worked the last 19 years in Portland area emergency rooms as a Mental Health Therapist/Crisis Interventionist (this role has different titles depending on the hospital system). In my role as an ER Mental Health Worker, I am responsible for evaluating, diagnosis and making treatment recommendations for those who come into the emergency room experiencing a mental health crisis or addiction crisis. Often, the emergency room is a place of last resort for individuals and loved one seeking help for their family/friend who is experiencing a crisis and don't know where else to turn. This means I see people at their most decompensated and mentally ill state and understand the emergent need for this amendment to the law.

As a seasoned Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I believe in maintaining an individual's civil rights and their right to make an INFORMED decision to refuse treatment even if it goes against my clinical recommendations (in the absence of breaking any laws). In many instances, this has meant advocating on behalf of the client and being subjected to harsh words from family members who may disagree with my decision to maintain a person's civil rights. I say this to make it clear that my ask for your support of HB 2467 does not seek to simply weaken someone's civil rights. If there was any time in history to preserve our civil rights, it's now. However, your support of HB 2467 is about saving lives and amending Oregon's strict civil commitment laws that have unintentionally harmed people and finally gets severely mentally ill individuals the medical treatment they need through out health systems and NOT the criminal system.

Your support of HB 2467 will allow mental health professionals, such as myself, to help the MOST SEVERELY mentally ill to not only get the help they need, but to SAVE their lives. The most heart wrenching and morally injurious part of my job is being unable to keep the most mentally ill patients from harm due to our state's strict

criteria for civil commitment. In my almost 20 years as an ER crisis worker, I can't tell you how many times I've evaluated those who have no idea how ill they are (known as "anosognosia") and are truly a danger to self. I have been forced to watch those who were brought into the emergency room after being found naked, running in traffic, totally out of their mind and in desperate need of help have their Notice of Mental Illness dropped because they don't meet the state's strict criteria for civil commitment, only to return hours or days later in the same condition. Our only hope is that they will be offered a 14 day voluntary diversion (I'm not always sure how "voluntary" this is with some patients but it's the only tool available in some cases). This revolving door of allowing clients in desperate need of help to discharge once their NMI is dropped is the very definition of insanity. Currently, our state's civil commitment laws make it so hard to mandate treatment for those who are severely decompensated, only to receive that help through the criminal justice system after they've committed a crime. This is immoral, unethical and unjust.

Please support HB 2467. It is a change that is long overdue and badly needed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Veronica Gallegos Lozano, MSW, LCSW, BSN