

Government Relations

March 11, 2019

Senate Judiciary Committee
SB 24

Chair Prozanski and members of the committee, for the record, I am Sarah Lochner, Multnomah County Government Relations. We are supportive of SB 24 and 25 with the proposed amendments.

I would echo everything Cheryl Ramirez said on behalf of Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs.

In addition, I do want to point out that while these bills will make the forensic evaluation system more efficient, improve communications among parties, and may partially relieve the great pressure on the limited state hospital beds, these bills are not going to solve the underlying problems.

I believe the solutions include:

1. Alternatives to arrest. We need ways to engage folks in voluntary treatment like Peer-run Respite Centers. We also need a change in our culture around arresting people because they are ill.
2. A variety of housing options and the supportive services to help people succeed in those settings.
3. The ability to recruit and retain a compassionate front line workforce — these individuals are not currently paid a living wage. We have heard that a number of these professionals are houseless themselves. We cannot expect people to stay in jobs that don't pay the rent.

I understand that revenue may need to be raised in order to make these investments, given the current budget environment.

Multnomah County encourages you to have discussions with your colleagues to make these solutions a priority; we are here to help support you in those discussions.

Because unless we make a significant investment in community based services and the workforce to provide those services, the problem will only get worse as our population continues to grow. We can't nickel and dime this very large problem and expect more than a nickel and dime result.

Thank you.