

David W. Oaks
2000 City View St.
Eugene, OR 97405

April 18, 2025

RE: Testimony in Opposition of HB 5006

To the Joint Ways & Means Committee:

My name is David W. Oaks and I am an Oregon mental health consumer & survivor. For nearly 50 years I've advocated for human rights and humane alternatives in mental health. You are faced with the challenging tasks of funding for emergency purposes. One easy way to save millions of dollars, would simply be to stop HB 2467. While funding is of course needed for severely troubled Oregonians, you should know that the voice of lived experience has been excluded from crafting HB 2467. If passed, this bill would write a blank check for a disempowering approach that relies on old-fashioned coercion and psychiatric drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs.

I am a consultant in Eugene with my firm, Aciu Institute. HB 2467 has been referred to your committee. It is frightening many of us who work for the empowerment of Oregonians with mental health issues. It would needlessly expand the number of Oregonians exposed to human rights violations, coercion and poor mental health care.

I oppose HB 2467 because it is inherently flawed both in how it is written, and its point of view. It relies on a completely unscientific ability to see 30 days into the future about an Oregonian becoming violent. Countless studies show this "crystal ball" approach doesn't work. Also, all advocates on disability, even the UN's World Health Organization, state that each law should apply equally to every citizen. Any type of discrimination based on a disability diagnosis is universally rejected. The concept of predicting future crimes is a direct contradiction of fundamental justice principles.

HB 2467 is so poorly written, that this unethical discrimination could apply to anyone with any medical condition. Even someone with diabetes who personally chooses not to take prescribed drugs, could be committed. This dangerous bill would allow friends, family, neighbors, acquaintances to initiate procedures for more coercion.

On the surface, it may appear that we need more funding for the current mental health system and many feel we must use more coercion. But this would be an expensive and wasteful approach, especially in the long-run.

On a deeper level, this bill flies in the face of lived experience, such as I have. As a college student back in the 1970's I went through times of extreme mental and emotional distress. When I was first offered a chance to enter a psychiatric facility, nestled within hundreds of acres of woods, I remember thinking, "Yes, I need a rest." But almost immediately, I encountered a broken mental health system that relied on coercion, bullying and overuse of a medical model that I later found to be unproven. I recall the trauma and heartbreak of being held down and physically-forced to have psychiatric drug injections that I have called a "wrecking ball to my mind." I have heard thousands of similar stories during my career as a community organizer. That trauma from mental health coercion is still with me today. I call this coercion a "Bill Cosby" approach to mental health.

I was nonviolent before, during, and after my mental health experience. The vast majority of us with psychiatric diagnoses are nonviolent, in fact studies show we are less violent than the general public. But even when a law is violated, we all know, no matter what, there should never be cruel and unusual punishment. There are more humane ways to help individuals who violate any law, then this bill promotes.

You should know that the committee that crafted HB 2467, excluded the voice of Oregonians with lived experience of mental health care. Especially offensive, this committee excluded organizations representing that voice. For example, the Oregon Consumer Advisory Council informs Oregon about this voice of lived experience. They were never included. They have

put out a statement about their lives that makes it clear HB 2467 is the wrong approach.

Scrap This Bill & Listen to Lived Experience

I invite you all to dig deeper into what truly constitutes help for troubled Oregonians who may violate a law. Unfortunately, our society has been misled to believe physically-based approaches such as coerced psychiatric drugs and even electroshock are necessary. Typical psychiatric drugs for serious mental and emotional problems can have dramatic, permanent, even fatal consequences. I know of many Oregonians who have chosen the pharmaceutical path, and may be doing well, but the crucial word there is “choice.” Sadly, the Trump administration has announced that homeless citizens with mental & emotional distress will be denied “housing first,” and instead given coerced mental health, which translates into forced drugs.

Currently more scientific literature is showing that non-drug alternatives can work, and in the long run can work far better. These alternative approaches should be offered more widely to Oregonians, and have the advantage of being more affordable, especially over a lifetime. Because the pharmaceutical industry has been pervasive for decades in our society, unfortunately the public does not hear the voice of lived experience.

Surprisingly, many of these humane and empowering approaches are less expensive than modern psychiatric drugs, which may cost \$1,000 per month. And once someone takes some of these super-powerful drugs, they may become habituated for life.

Even those who have chosen psychiatric drugs as part of their care, often use many other approaches: peer mutual support, counseling, exercise, improved diet, avoiding harmful substances, spirituality, art and so much more. However organizations that represent the voice of these mental health consumers have universally opposed pushing for more coercion. Because of this misinformation, taxpayers are asked to fund blank checks

for more drugs, without offering alternatives. These drugs can not only be very expensive, they are often so addictive that trying to quit can manifest the opposite of the intended effect. Scientists call this a discontinuation syndrome. I call it addiction, so insidious this is similar to the fentanyl crisis, but this time of the mind itself.

Please save emergency funding for proven evidence-based approaches. I oppose HB 5006 because HB 2467 and this model of abuse would just be a waste of funds to increase coercion and drugging. Please oppose HB 2467. Let us start again. This time let's hear from Oregonians who have lived experience of mental health care, and let's include organizations that represent their voices. Please stop this push for more irrational, harmful coercion. It's time for a new paradigm that will offer humane options for mental and emotional support for Oregonians.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D W. Oaks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "W".

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