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LC 227: Strengthening Peer-Led Mental Health Support

This proposal focuses existing peer respite funding on two centers that are successfully serving communities with peer-led mental health supports today, to make unused resources available for other urgent needs across the state.

Oregon Needs Sustainable Peer Respite Services

Peer respite centers are voluntary programs where people with lived and living experience of mental health or substance use—peers—provide short-term, home-like support for people experiencing a mental health crisis. They offer an alternative to emergency departments and hospitalization by providing a safe environment where individuals can stabilize, connect with peers, and continue recovery-oriented services.

In 2021, HB 2980 directed OHA to establish four regional peer respite centers and appropriated \$6 million per biennium to support them. While OHA offered funding and support across the four regions identified in the law, only two centers have successfully opened: one in the Portland metropolitan area and one on the Oregon coast.

Unfortunately, efforts to establish centers in southern Oregon and central/eastern Oregon have not been successful due to workforce shortages, limited peer support infrastructure, difficulties securing and operating facilities, and other local constraints. As a result, half of the funding remains tied to centers that have not opened, even as these regions—and virtually every community in Oregon—have other significant behavioral health service needs.

Continuing the statutory requirements to operate four peer respite centers when only two have proven sustainable limits Oregon's ability to invest resources where they can have the greatest impact.

Preserving Peer-Led Mental Health Support

This proposal continues funding for the two centers that are successfully operating, ensuring continued access to peer-led, trauma-informed crisis supports and helping people feel safe, understood, and connected to care during crises. It removes the requirement for the two additional centers, which makes the unused resources available for other needs of people in Oregon.

Results and insights from these projects—including understanding why some have not opened—will help guide future decisions about how to strengthen and potentially expand peer respite services.

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