



MEDIA RELEASE

Lincoln County Board of Commissioners

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County Commissioners to Consider “Stepping Up” Resolution

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At their October 5 meeting, the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners will consider a resolution to join the national Stepping Up initiative, designed to reduce the number of people with mental illness in jails—an estimated two million nationwide.

“It’s a challenge in Lincoln County,” says Commissioner Bill Hall. “According to our jail staff, typically 30 percent of those in our jail have been treated for a mental health diagnosis and about 10 percent have a serious and persistent mental illness.”

The premise of Stepping Up, a partnership of the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments and the American Psychiatric Association, is that keeping mentally ill people—often arrested for minor misdemeanors—in jail is costly, doesn’t improve public safety, and doesn’t offer them the help and treatment they need.

Since the initiative was launched in the spring of 2015, more than 300 counties have signed on to date, including nine in Oregon.

“We’ve already got some important pieces of a better solution in place,” said Hall, “Including a jail inmate counselor, a Mental Health Court, and the coming launch of mental health mobile crisis services in the county,” but there’s a lot more that can be done.

The proposal comes to the Board of Commissioners with support from the county’s Mental Health Advisory Committee, Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, Samaritan Health Services and the Lincoln County School District. “It’s good to see broad recognition of how widespread the impact of this problem is on the community,” Hall said.

Commissioner Hall said there’s no guarantee that participation in Stepping Up will bring added resources to the county, but he’s hopeful, pointing out that mental health reform has become a high priority issue in both Salem and Washington, D.C.

“Lawmakers at the state and federal levels see what we’ve been doing isn’t working,” Hall said. “People in just one segment of this population, people sent to the State Hospital after their attorneys file a motion that they can’t aid and assist in their defense, are costing the state an average of \$64,000 a year. The director of the Oregon Health Authority has acknowledged that we could provide someone with housing, treatment and supportive services for far less than that.”

More information about the initiative is available at www.stepuptogether.org

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