

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1866.

My name is Bob Staples. President of the Brett M. Staples Brain Disorder Awareness Coalition, and I am here today to urge this committee to ensure that the state-designated agency responsible for advocating for individuals with serious mental illness is truly independent and neutral.

This bill is not just a technical change—it's a matter of trust. The people this agency serves are some of the most vulnerable in our state. They often face systemic barriers and discrimination. They deserve an advocate that stands firmly on their side—not one aligned with service providers, government agencies, or treatment systems that may at times contribute to their challenges.

Neutrality means more than being unaffiliated; it means being fearless in speaking truth to power, even when that power is the state itself. It means prioritizing the voice and rights of the individual, not the convenience or preferences of institutions. Without this independence, the role of advocate is compromised, and those most in need are left unheard.

LD 1866 takes steps in the right direction, but it must go further to guarantee neutrality—not just in name, but in structure, funding, and governance. We need an agency that is accountable only to the people it serves, not beholden to the very systems it must sometimes challenge.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill and strengthen it to guarantee that the designated advocacy agency remains independent, impartial, and fiercely devoted to the rights of individuals with serious mental illness.

Thank you.