



Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and good members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Betsy Sweet, and I am here on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in favor of LD 1866. Let me be candid: The agencies who make up the Collaborative, at times, find themselves on the receiving end of investigations, complaints, and public criticism from the advocates who would be made permanent through this bill. These moments can be uncomfortable, even contentious. But we believe they are also a necessary part of a just, responsive, and patient-centered mental health system.

We support this legislation not in spite of those tensions, but because of them.

The people we serve often experience disempowerment, trauma, and marginalization—especially during times of acute psychiatric crisis. Independent patient advocates play a critical role in ensuring that those individuals have a voice, a means of recourse, and someone firmly in their corner. They help hold all of us—providers, systems, and public agencies—accountable to the people we are here to serve.

We know that when patients feel heard and supported, their trust in the system increases. When advocates shine a light on shortcomings or failures, they often expose opportunities to improve care. And when providers and advocates can work collaboratively, we see better outcomes for everyone involved.

These advocates have been serving for decades, but under the auspices of the consent decree. This bill codifies them in statute so that they do not go away, and their service is not dependent on yearly approval and support from the legislature or executive. In addition, it will not cost any additional money since they are already serving. This bill does several important things:

- It codifies the advocacy role and gives it structure, sustainability, and reach.
- It ensures that individuals with serious mental illness—whether in hospitals, community programs, or other settings—have consistent access to skilled, independent advocates.
- It promotes transparency through monitoring, reporting, and engagement with both the department and the Legislature.

We believe that formalizing this role in statute will help stabilize the advocacy function post consent decree, while also encouraging clearer expectations and more constructive relationships between providers and advocates. That is good for patients, good for providers, and good for the mental health system as a whole.

We urge the committee to support this bill and recognize the essential role that advocacy plays in building a fairer, more accountable, and more humane behavioral health system.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this work.

*The members of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative are Sweetser, Inc., Opportunity Alliance, Volunteers of America, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Spurwink, Community Concepts*