

**LD 475 Resolve, To Create the Frequent Users System Engagement Collaborative**

**Testimony in Support**

**March 24, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyers and members of the Health and Human Services Committee my name is Melissa Skahan and I am the Vice President of Mission for Northern Light Mercy Hospital. I am here today to speak in support of this bill.

Northern Light Mercy Hospital was founded by the Sisters of Mercy a century ago and continues to serve as Portland's community hospital. Our mission asks that we afford special attention to the poor and marginalized populations; many of whom we have the privilege to care for in the hospital, primary and specialty care practices, and in our mission programs, McAuley Residence and Gary's House.

LD 475 **Resolve, To Create the Frequent Users System Engagement Collaborative** holds great promise to improve outcomes for some of the most complex patients and families who consistently use high cost medical, corrections, child protective, and social service systems and other resources. People – even the most hardworking people - are unable to engage in treatment or productive work without a safe place to lay their head at night. The best interventions that all of these systems have to offer will most likely fail to stick unless housing and evidence-based services are delivered in concert.

McAuley Residence, a department of Mercy Hospital is a comprehensive two-generational program with housing for families affected by substance use disorder. The moms most often have a long history of poly-substance use disorder starting in middle school, severe and persistent mental illness, trauma, sexual violence, and poverty. They are the high users of systems with children in State custody, criminal histories, multiple stays in acute hospitals and substance use disorder treatment programs, and both State and Federal assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and General Assistance.

At McAuley Residence, we routinely help moms and families stabilize - find recovery, reunify with children, pursue employment or higher education, and develop a path to self-sufficiency. We could not achieve these outcomes without housing and collaboration with multiple agencies and providers. The Center for Developing Child at Harvard University offers three principles as critical for improving outcomes for families – support responsive relationships, strengthen core life skills, and reduce sources of stress.

By removing barriers to treatment and ensuring access to safe, stable housing, families at McAuley Residence can engage in treatment, skill-building, and planned, goal-oriented behaviors. Without basic supports, such as food, housing, medical care, and behavioral health services the potential of breaking the cycle of addiction and poverty will continue to remain out of reach for most. Similar to

our experience at McAuley Residence, the Frequent Users System Engagement Collaborative has opportunity to examine the systems and services that interact with high utilizers and make recommendation for improved outcomes.

I also want to offer a friendly amendment to this bill; we have discussed this with the bill sponsor, and she is supportive. Section 3 of the bill refers to consumers of psychiatric hospital services as one of the criteria for the collaborative to consider. We agree and recommend that a representative of a psychiatric hospital be added to the membership of the Collaborative defined in Section 2 of the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/>

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