

Health and Human Services Committee
LB 534
February 9, 2017

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Good afternoon, Senator Riepe, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Sheri Dawson (S-H-E-R-I - D-A-W-S-O-N), and I am the Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. I am here to provide neutral testimony regarding LB 534. This bill establishes a housing coordinator within the Division of Behavioral Health. The new position is responsible for providing training and technical assistance throughout the state. The bill provides general funds for the newly created position. Additional funds are provided for housing-related services and supports on a one time basis.

LB 534 specifies the Legislature's intent to appropriate \$1,100,000 in FY 2017-18 to the Department of Health and Human Services to hire a housing coordinator (Program 268) and to distribute aid to nonprofit entities and programs providing integrated housing services and support for individuals with serious mental illness (Program 038). The bill does not specify the Legislature's intended fund mix, nor does it identify an intent to appropriate funds in FY 2018-19 to sustain efforts for services or coordination.

The competitive basis of funding in LB 534 is not clear. Currently, the Division of Behavioral Health disburses the funds for housing, housing related services and supports for individuals our division serves. However, several other entities, including those serving the populations referenced in the bill, also disburse funds.

I am concerned with identifying specific services, supports, positions, practices or models in legislation as this limits the flexibility of implementation, cross system administration and future innovation. The ability to operate from a system of care approach to maximize and leverage resources and avoid duplication of services across systems is difficult to achieve when such specifics are in statute.

The legislation is intended to improve housing coordination and support services for a broad mix of populations, disabilities, partners, and authorities that cross several existing support systems. The Division of Behavioral Health is actively engaging system partners and developing current strategic planning and work plans. Additionally, the work of the LB1033 Olmstead Task Force will be incorporated into system improvement. Current efforts within DHHS are directed at creating cross system efficiencies, harmonizing housing and housing related services and supports, developing resource inventories and maximizing resources.

Thank you for the focus on housing and for the opportunity to provide comments on LB 534. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.