

Status Hearing

June 5, 2019

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I'd like to thank the court again for giving our allies an opportunity to participate in this process and be engaged formally with this court. I also appreciate the time this court has allotted for public testimony, and for the generous spirit you have maintained over the years in all these hearings. Speaking up and speaking out is a necessary part of empowerment, for oneself and for a community of persons with mental illness and addiction not here today but who may be directly affected by the decisions made in this room today. And it's essential for the credibility of this settlement agreement that those making decisions on behalf of others take the time to listen and learn.

There are about - just based on basic epidemiology and census data - somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 people who live in Portland and share the experience of severe and persistent mental illness. There's another 80,000 people who could be diagnosed with alcoholism. Probably another 200,000+ who have addiction to a legal or illegal drug. Maybe another 60,000 people with personality disorders. There's a lot of crossover in these groups, but collectively they're one of the largest groups in our community - and certainly the largest diagnostic group. And, as we all are aware, these are the people who are arrested, and tried, and jailed, and paroled.

It's no surprise this diagnostic group is entirely estranged from law enforcement. No surprise at all. Often for people with mental illness the worst day of their lives was spent in custody of police. Often for people with addiction, that was the day everything collapsed, the day they lost their job, lost their home, lost their kids, and some of us lost their lives.

So when the PCCEP plan or PCCEP members speak about "community-engagement" in reference to race, or youth, or religious communities, or neighborhoods - and not mental illness, I'm not surprised. Those are communities are easy to contact, easy to relate to, easy to engage with. It just takes money, and effort, and skill, and persistence, and leadership, and time, and more money. But it can be done successfully. The police can repair those relationships if they want to.

But the separation between law enforcement - and the courts - and people with mental illness is wide and terrifying. We read in the paper everyday how people with mental illness are powerless and abused by law enforcement. Over half the people arrested in

Portland are homeless (which to us is just a desperate phase of our illnesses). Our people are queued up on gurneys in hospital hallways and overflow in jails waiting to see a doctor. Our people sleep in gutters and howl at the moon. And our people, statistically, are the ones harmed by police.

So what can we do about this? I have ideas. You probably have ideas. I guess everyone in this room has ideas. Ideas are okay. They're a good start. They show some interest in the problem. But what are we going to do with these ideas? I guess there are two things. One, we can keep our ideas to ourselves. The other is we can share them and talk about them and compare them and refine them and measure them and add to them and throw them out and start over.

So where and when does that sharing of ideas happen? That idea sharing? Well we've agreed somehow it happens when the PCCEP gets around to it. And after six months or so, the PCCEP is no closer today to creating a safe forum for a discussion of reducing use of force against people with mental illness than when it started. It might get there with unbiased unconflicted leadership. It might get there with members who have some gentleness and curiosity about the problem. It might get there by talking with people who have a track record of good ideas. It might get there with a capable facilitator, or a reasonable budget for solicit community involvement. Those things might materialize over the next six months or so. Hard to tell at the moment.

So at this time I oppose the court's final acceptance of the PCCEP Plan. It might work, but today we just don't know because it hasn't worked.