

Good afternoon, Chairman Ruby and members of the committee. My name is Kristi Brintnell, and I am the Chair of the Walsh County Commission.

I am here today to testify on behalf of the Walsh County Commissioners in strong support of HB1337.

For years, our county has grappled with the frustrating and costly cycle of individuals being arrested, released, and then rearrested. This revolving door is a systemic challenge that burdens our law enforcement, judicial system, and taxpayers. But most importantly, it fails the individuals caught in this cycle and leaves the root causes of their incarceration unaddressed.

One of the biggest gaps we've identified is access to mental health services for individuals in custody. The time spent in jail often presents a critical opportunity to intervene, but without the necessary resources, this opportunity is lost.

In 2021, recognizing this need and urged by our Sheriff and Health District, the Walsh County Commission took a bold step. We allocated funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to support mental health services in our local jail. With this funding, we secured a 3-year contract with a mental health provider who delivered comprehensive behavioral health counseling and therapy to inmates during their time in custody.

The results were remarkable. Many individuals engaged in the program, and we saw firsthand the difference that access to professional mental health care could make. For some, this was their first opportunity to address the underlying issues that contributed to their incarceration—whether it be substance use disorders, untreated mental illness, or trauma.

But while the program has shown great promise, it is not enough. The demand for these services far exceeds what our current resources can support. HB1337 represents a crucial step forward. By providing dedicated funding for mental health services in county jails, this legislation would allow counties like ours to expand access to critical care and build upon the success of programs like ours.

Investing in mental health services within jails is not just a compassionate choice—it is a practical and cost-effective one. By addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, we can reduce recidivism, improve public safety, and help individuals regain stability in their lives. This is an investment in people, in communities, and in a more sustainable justice system.

On behalf of the Walsh County Commission, I urge you to support HB1337 and ensure counties have the resources they need to break the cycle of incarceration and provide meaningful opportunities for change.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.