

Dear Chairperson Ruby and House Human Services Committee Members,

I am writing to you as a clinician and university professor whose research agenda focuses on mental health. I have 13 (plus) years of clinical practice experience and continue to provide consulting services for mental health within a government agency. I have practiced clinically across (just to name a few) diverse fields, including inpatient psychiatric care, residential treatment, intensive in-home services, and other roles closely aligned with the correctional system. I urge you to support HB 1337, which seeks to allocate essential funding for mental health services for individuals in custody. This bill is a critical step toward addressing a profound and growing public health need that directly impacts not only those in custody but also our communities at large.

The prevalence of mental health challenges among incarcerated individuals is staggering. Many individuals in custody experience mental health issues, with many having been undiagnosed or untreated prior to their incarceration. The lack of access to appropriate mental health care within correctional facilities exacerbates these challenges, leading to a cycle of recidivism, heightened safety concerns for staff and inmates, and worsened health outcomes for individuals in custody. In my professional experience, I have witnessed firsthand how untreated mental health issues manifest within correctional environments. These issues can lead to behavioral disturbances, self-harm, and even suicide, placing an enormous burden on correctional staff and resources.

Economically, the cost of untreated mental health issues places a significant burden on our correctional and public health systems, far exceeding the investment required for adequate care. Recidivism driven by untreated mental health needs leads to repeated incarcerations, compounding costs for the criminal justice system and taxpayers. These additional expenses include housing, healthcare, and legal processing for individuals cycling through the system, creating an unsustainable economic drain. Providing mental health care in custody is not just compassionate but also a sound fiscal strategy, as it lowers recidivism rates and allows individuals to reintegrate into society as productive workers. This, in turn, alleviates long-term public expenses and strengthens the state's economic framework.

Correctional facilities are uniquely positioned to serve as a critical point of intervention for individuals who have slipped through the cracks of our mental health care system. Addressing mental health also directly targets the growing and alarming addiction crisis, as substance abuse and addiction often stem from attempts to cope with underlying mental health challenges. By focusing on mental health, we are addressing the root causes of addiction, providing individuals with healthier, more sustainable solutions to their struggles. Incarceration often provides a rare opportunity where individuals are compelled to focus on their underlying issues, creating a crucial window to deliver therapy using a range of modalities and psychoeducation. This structured environment can facilitate meaningful engagement with mental health care, addressing challenges that many might otherwise avoid or neglect in the outside world.

By supporting HB 1337, you are advocating for a more just and humane system that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment. This investment has the power to reduce rates of reincarceration,

allowing individuals to return to their families, rejoin the workforce, and provide for their loved ones. This not only strengthens family units but also addresses generational cycles of incarceration and poverty, creating healthier communities for future generations. Mental health funding in custody ensures that individuals receive the care they need to address underlying issues, paving the way for healthier outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Supporting this bill is not only an investment in the well-being of individuals in custody but also a commitment to public safety and community health.

Thank you for your attention to this matter

Dr. Lacey Corneliusen, DSW, LCSW, LMSW