

House Judiciary Committee Testimony
HB 2697
02/17/2022
By Randy Callstrom

Good afternoon, members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Randy Callstrom. I am the President and CEO of Wyandot Behavioral Health Network, the community mental health center serving Wyandotte County, and the current President of the Association of Community Mental Health Center's Board. It is my privilege to provide testimony to you today in support of HB2697.

Wyandot Center works very closely with the judicial system in Wyandotte County and for many years completed the evaluations to determine a person's competency to stand trial. As of this Monday, February 14, there were seventeen (17) Wyandotte County defendants ordered to Larned State Hospital for competency restoration. These individuals have been awaiting placement for as long as 328 days. After discussion with the County Sheriff, the District Attorney office, and district judges, we believe HB2697 offers an opportunity to expedite restoration and the judicial process for certain individuals. This seems to be in the best interest of the individual and to the county.

As the Wyandotte County's CMHC, we are interested in working with the Sheriff and the courts to restore competency as quickly as possible for individuals when that is appropriate. However, there are questions that deserve consideration regarding this bill. For a CMHC to provide restoration treatment, training would need to be made available as this is outside of the scope of our current practice.

This is also a service that may not work in certain jurisdictions due to workforce issues or other local barriers. Thus, it is critical local restoration treatment by a CMHC be a "may" rather than a "shall" and allow local communities to determine what will work for them or not.

Medication over a person's objection is also a critical issue. Community Mental Health Centers and local jails are not equipped to safely administer medication for someone who is unwilling to receive the medication and could potentially be combative.

Given the workforce challenges across the state, I would advocate that the bill reference Qualified Mental Health Providers or QMHPs being able to provide restoration treatment. This would allow licensed social workers, marriage and family therapists, and other licensed mental health professionals to provide these services.

Finally, there is the question of who would pay for local restoration treatment.

With the above considerations, I support HB2697. Providing timely restoration treatment is in the best interest of the person being detained, will expedite the judicial process, and place less financial and other burdens on counties.