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Oregon Must Blaze Trail for Mental Health Services

By SEN. AVEL GORDLY

Over 10 years ago, my son was diagnosed with a brain disorder.

A Navy veteran, who served during the Persian Gulf era, his experiences have given me a crash course in the frustrations and difficulties in navigating Oregon's mental health system. And after serving as a member of the Governor's Mental Health Alignment Workgroup, this is what I know:

Oregon's mental health system is fragmented and lacks space and appropriate levels of care for our citizens with mental health disorders. Our jails are used as mental health facilities. Personnel who work in the mental health system are inadequately trained and supported. And the public erroneously believes that a person with mental health disorders pose a threat to public safety.

The number of Oregonians with mental health disorders has risen 17 percent since 1990. There are 124,000 uninsured or publicly insured Oregonians who have a serious brain disorder, like my son.

Twenty-four percent of these people are not receiving the services they need, and an additional 23 percent are not receiving needed medications. Yet our budget to support treatment and medications for the uninsured has grown very little, if at all, in the past decade.

In addition, while the number of persons with mental health disorders



Sen. Avel Gordly

grows, the insurance industry continues to decrease coverage of mental health disorders, and mental health medication. Many an Oregon family can tell you horror stories of using their life savings, putting a second, third, or even fourth mortgage on their home, just to pay for access to mental health services for a child, parent or other family member. They do so because they love their child, and they do not qualify for Medicaid, and because their insurance does not cover serious mental health disorders. You and I would

**'I WOULD NOT WISH ON ANYONE THE PAINFUL AND NIGHTMARISH STRUGGLES MY SON, MY FAMILY AND I HAVE HAD TO ENDURE AS WE WADED THROUGH OREGON'S MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM'**  
— SEN. AVEL GORDLY

determined to protect Rowland from the growing mob.

forgotten."

The act now awaits the approval of Gov. Frank Keating.

The legislation follows the release of a report by a commission appointed by the governor to examine the race riot, which exploded on the night of May 31, 1921.

An African American named Dick Rowland had been arrested earlier in the day and charged with sexually assaulting a young white female elevator operator.

By evening, rumors that Rowland would be lynched had drawn an ugly white crowd to the courthouse. Meanwhile, African-American veterans of World War I had armed themselves,

do the same thing.

This is Oregon. We can do better than this, and we must. Two bills working their way through the Oregon Legislature will go a long way towards improving the plight of Oregonians living with mental health disorders. House Bill 3017 will ensure that all Oregonians have access to a basic level of healthcare services that includes access to mental health services on an equal basis with physical health services. The bill does so by using the Oregon Health Plan list to arrive at a basic health benefits package for all Oregonians publicly or privately insured.

House Bill 3024 provides for plans of how a local mental health authority will ensure the delivery of, and be accountable for, clinically appropriate services in continuum of care based on consumer needs of both children and adults. We need 24-hour crisis services. Communities need secure and non-secure extended psychiatric care to help stabilize people and get them appropriate medications, ensuring a quality of life. We need dual diagnosis services and day treatment. We need a civil commitment process that protects the dignity and rights of loved ones in crisis, yet permits placement in a secure psychiatric setting. And we need well-trained, culturally competent professionals to work in all of those settings.

Creating a community-based mental health system, with access to a range of levels of care, must be a priority.

ity. I would not wish on anyone the painful and nightmarish struggles my son, my family and I have had to endure as we waded through Oregon's Mental Health system. Let's continue

Oregon's tradition of blazing new trails by leading the way on services for the mentally ill. We must work to pass HB 3017 and HB 3024. It is the right thing to do for all Oregonians.

Law Would Make Amends for 1921 Race Riot

Oklahoma lawmakers have approved legislation aimed at making some amends for a 1921 race riot that left as many as 300 African Americans dead and destroyed dozens of thriving businesses.

The Tulsa Race Riot Reconciliation Act establishes a scholarship fund, with priority consideration for the descendants of those who survived the two-day massacre, but it does not offer reparations for riot survivors.

"We are in a mode of healing," said state Sen. Maxine Horner, one of the bill's sponsors. "We want to bring some closure to the past, but we also want to make sure that the past isn't

determined to protect Rowland from the growing mob.

Horner, who was born in Tulsa in 1933, believes the bill serves to create an accurate historical record of "a very dark time."

"To bring this up from under the carpet and get it written and in documented form means it will be in our textbooks. It will be a part of history," she said.

But the measure has some impassioned detractors, as well. The bill passed the state Senate by a vote of 32-13. The 13 "no" votes were cast by Republican senators, who contend the language of bill paints all white people "as thugs," said state Sen.

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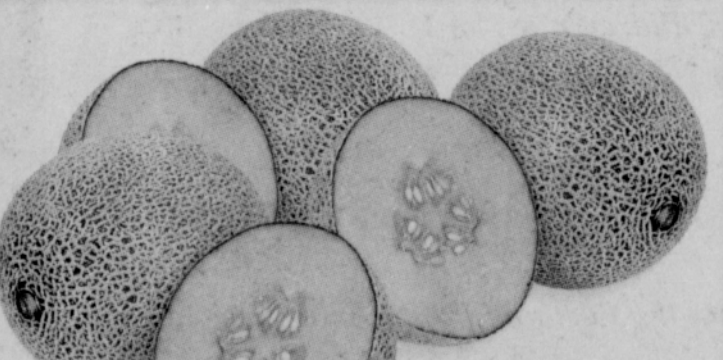
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