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Response to Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee community engagement meeting

1 message

rochelle silver <rsilver1@yahoo.com>

Fri, Apr 23, 2021 at 7:20 PM

To: "jgullickson@mhaoforegon.org" <jgullickson@mhaoforegon.org>

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Dear Janie Gullickson, chair of the Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee.

I'm a member of a work group of community members which has been deeply involved in police accountability and reform for several years. The group is made up of attorneys, clinicians, and people with lived experience of mental illness, addiction, and alcoholism. The work group is for the Mental Health Alliance (MHA), an amicus to US DOJ v City of Portland. The MHA provides testimony to the court on the progress of the settlement, of which the Behavioral Health Unit is one of over 180 items. Therefore the workgroup is interested in the operations of the Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee.

I'm also a retired public psychologist and former member of both the Citizen Review Committee and the Community Oversight Advisory Board.

I was able to attend the Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee community engagement meeting held on March 24. My understanding is it was the first open meeting - a meeting where the public could attend - of this committee since its formation in 2017. We appreciate this community engagement but we recognize that it is entirely different from the monthly Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee meeting.

I learned about the March 24 meeting only by chance when it was mentioned in a different city online meeting just a day before. As far as I am aware, no one else in our work group was informed of this meeting.

The primary question asked by the public in the ninety minute Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee meeting was, why aren't Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee meetings open to the public?

The response meeting attendees heard from you to this primary question seemed to indicate that you were not willing or able to listen to the question. Your response seemed at odds with the basic ideals of transparency and community engagement - which are fundamental goals of the settlement agreement.

What attendees heard you say is that 1) the meeting is closed by consensus of the meeting members. I have no way of knowing this is true because there is no access to this meeting to hear directly from them. And 2) that members of the Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee might be embarrassed by what they say in a public meeting and therefore the meeting must be closed.

We also heard from Lt. Hettman in the community meeting that the Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee does not "staff" people, meaning discuss or share medical or clinical information about individual persons whom the police encounter- so closing the meeting on behalf of medical or personal privacy isn't at issue.

Since the Behavioral Health Unit staff did not make a recording of the community engagement meeting, or a recording is not available to the public, and no minutes of the meeting are available, it's possible you did not consider the question fully, or its implications. We'd like to give you an opportunity to restate what your position is and the reasons for not allowing the Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee to proceed according to an open meeting policy.

We may share your response in court and with our colleagues, but in fairness to the purpose of the settlement agreement and considering the legality of public meetings in Oregon, we would like to give you another opportunity to state your reasons.

I encourage you to open all Behavioral Health Unit Advisory Committee meetings to the public. Our work group believes it is entirely in your power, as chair of this committee, to do this and do it immediately. In the disability community transparency in public policy design is an important value. The saying is, "Nothing about us without us." By closing this meeting - the only meeting the Portland Police Bureau hosts about serving people with mental illness, addiction, and alcoholism - you close the door to people with disabilities. Please open that door.

I look forward to your response.

Rochelle Silver PhD

Members of the Mental Health Alliance

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