



# OKLAHOMANS *for* CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

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## **Advocates Warn Cuts Will Gut Mental Health Care, Undermine SQ781**

TULSA – Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR) is raising a call to action following news that the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) will not renew more than **300 contracts for community-based mental health providers**, a move that will strip thousands of Oklahomans of life-saving care.

“Oklahoma must make mental health a priority, not a budget target whenever money gets tight,” Mike Shelton, Executive Director for OCJR, says. “Cutting off access to treatment doesn’t reduce costs; it multiplies them by forcing people into emergency rooms and county jails. Ignoring these needs puts lives at risk and leaves taxpayers footing a bigger bill for a less effective response.”

According to their **Investing in Justice report**, the need for services is dire:

- **1 in 5 Oklahomans experiences a mental illness, and 1 in 10 adults has a substance use disorder**—among the highest rates in the country.
- **Yet only 15% of Oklahomans who need mental health treatment receive it, and fewer than 10% receive substance use treatment.**
- **Untreated mental illness and substance abuse costs county governments anywhere from \$10 to \$40 million annually.** Eliminating state contracts for community-based mental health providers simply pushes that cost onto the counties and will cost our county governments millions of dollars.

Cutting contracts threatens to reverse this progress, leaving counties without the very providers they depend on to deliver SQ781-funded services. Without these contracts, Oklahoma risks more people in crisis ending up in **jail cells or emergency rooms** rather than treatment beds—an approach proven to be more costly and less effective.

Shelton said, “Canceling these contracts directly undermines SQ781 and the will of Oklahoma voters. Citizens chose to reinvest savings from criminal justice reform into community treatment programs to keep people out of prison and on the path to recovery. Turning away from that commitment erases hard-won progress and abandons the very communities that reform was meant to serve.”

OCJR is urging ODMHSAS and state leaders to reconsider the contract reductions and ensure that funds are directed to **expand treatment access rather than shrink it.**

*Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform is a 501(c)3 nonprofit whose mission is to serve as a catalyst for systemic change in Oklahoma's criminal legal system to promote just and appropriate accountability while reducing mass incarceration and its long-term harm to families. For more information, visit our [website](http://www.okjusticereform.org).*

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