

May 24, 1989

LB 813

SENATOR PETERSON: Mr. President and members, I am back here asking your support for the override of the 34 beds that are so desperately needed for people with mental illness. The need for these beds, as I said, is critical and will not go away with just the hope that it will. I know there was...I knew there was a need for these 34 beds but I didn't realize how great it was till I began working on this. Dr. John Baldwin estimated it at 100 adult beds short and 40 adolescent and children beds. At the time, I thought that was a little high. If you, as senators, ladies and gentlemen, on this floor would get involved in this like I have, you would believe this more and more that 100 beds might be realistic.

PRESIDENT: Senator Peterson, may I interrupt you a minute. (Gavel.) Could we please have it quiet so we can hear the speaker? Thank you.

SENATOR PETERSON: If you have any doubt about the critical need, just pick up the phone and talk to a county attorney, a sheriff or other law enforcement officer, county's attorneys, city's private hospitals, nursing homes, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, patients, families and advocates. They will tell you the same thing they have told me that there is a critical gap in the mental health delivery system and in inpatient beds. This is the reason they are lobbying to get these 34 beds to relieve the pressure in the system. You will soon find that a critical gap is out there and we don't have any place to go with people that need to be placed in the regional center for two to three weeks, four weeks, whatever. Therefore, we have situations where law enforcement officials have to drive mentally ill persons around in their squad cars until they calm down or until an inpatient bed can be made...be found. Just talked to my local county sheriff in Madison County with a population of about 32,000 people. In the last six weeks he has had two committals and no place to go with them and a regional center sitting in our own backyard. That is a waste of resources to let these people alone that a person is not getting the treatment they need. Why are we asking law enforcement officials to care for the mentally ill? Why aren't we using existing psychiatric staff, building and facilities that we have available to meet this critical gap? These are questions the people on the front lines are asking. They didn't realize that there were 34 beds at Norfolk Regional Center and this is true. In the Omaha area they are finding out now that there is 34 beds. Sheriffs are finding out there is 34 beds available