

## Proposed Senate Bill 917

I am writing in support of proposed Senate Bill 917, which promotes a safe reporting culture for employees to report problems and concerns such as abuse and neglect to authorities without interference from employers.

Individuals who do not have the power to speak up for themselves depend on caregivers and employees to speak out about wrongdoings in their care environment.

Caregivers in Oregon are often put in difficult situations when they accept positions to care for the older adults or disabled individuals. Front line employees working as care providers are not licensed and work at minimum wage. Employees who report problems may be labeled as “troublemakers” and oftentimes are terminated which promotes a culture of silence.

Licensed professionals, such as Registered Nurses are required to report any suspected abuse and neglect and I have experienced firsthand, the interference and retaliation from employers when making these reports.

These situations have left a lasting impression on me and what I now consider to be a concerning human rights violation in our senior care industry.

Imagine a 69 year old female who was inappropriately placed in a locked memory care facility. Over a period of six months, I experienced the administration of the facility attempt to discourage and interfere with meetings with the ombudsman and was personally discouraged from talking to the ombudsman. Administration interrupted meetings I had with the ombudsman when I was voicing my concerns about inappropriate placement and discouraged staff to talk about the situation. With the help of the ombudsman’s office, this resident was able to leave the locked memory care unit and is now living independently with the freedom she deserves. Without an advocate to speak on her behalf, this woman would still be locked in a memory care unit with no recourse.

During my short time working in residential care communities as a Registered Nurse, I have filed reports to Adult Protective Services on multiple occasions for problems, concerns and potential abuse. These reports included unsanitary living conditions, widespread weight loss due to inadequate nutrition, injuries and falls related to lack of training, potential physical and sexual abuse and worker injuries due to lack of transfer/lifting training. All of these reports were made because I cared about the people I served and was concerned for their well-being.

This Bill encourages transparency of problems and concerns that need to be brought to light and discourages employers from interfering with these reports. It will help protect the vulnerable individuals who live in these care settings that need workers to speak up on their behalf.

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