

To Chair Williamson and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to you about HB 3338 that prohibits police officers commissioned by public university from carrying firearms as police officers outside of police headquarters if public university is located in city with population exceeding 150,000. By taking weapons away from university police officers, no one will be safer on campus. It will prevent officers from doing their job. In the event of an active shooter, officers would be required to return to station, check out their weapons and then return to the location. Those are valuable minutes and lives that are lost. They would be unable to respond quickly and efficiently. As research has shown, those first few minutes are incredibly important.

I often discover the public at large has no idea that university police officers have attended the same police academy as all other municipal police departments in Oregon. They are held to the same standards as their counterparts at any other police department. Training does not end once they leave the academy either. They are required every three years to complete 80+ hours of continued training in order to be re-certified along with being qualified on their firearm 8 times every 12 months and 8 hours devoted to use of force training per year. UOPD often goes far and above those requirements.

My husband has worked at the University of Oregon for 13 years, starting as a Public Safety Officer and continuing as one of the first Police Sergeants when they transitioned to a full police department. I remember him accepting the job and knowing he only had a baton and pepper spray to defend himself if his life were in danger. I remember him coming home, in tears, because two of his coworkers were nearly drowned in the millrace and were only saved because a passerby assisted. I remember many sleepless nights, worried about his safety. I remember the relief when the Oregon legislature passed the law to make university officers sworn police.

No officer goes to work and hopes to end someone's life. My husband remembers every single time he has drawn his weapon, every single time a weapon has been drawn on him, and every single time he thought he might not be coming home to his family. He does not share every story with me, but he shares enough. He has arrested car thieves, sex offenders, and criminals with warrants from drug offences to murder. He spends his shifts keeping students safe from outside threats that find the campus environment a place full of big ticket items and often naive students. By taking away weapons from officers, college campuses will not be safer for students. College campuses will instead be even more of a target than they already are.

Thank you,
Crystal McPheeters