



HB 5024

Chair's Lieber and Nosse, Members of the Committee,

My name is Dan Torres and I am with Oregon AFSCME Council 75. Oregon AFSCME represents over 30,000 workers across the state from non-profit to local government to state public employees. I am submitting testimony today on behalf of the members who work at the Oregon State Hospital as Nurses and Doctors. I am asking that the legislature continue to find ways to support the workers and the State Hospital so they can continue to provide the supportive environment OSH has been known for.

The last year with the pandemic has been hard on all who deal in the healthcare sector and this includes the Nurses and Doctors at OSH. Even before the global pandemic, ensuring enough nurses at the State Hospital has been a challenge. The legislature previously allocated funds for additional nursing staff but have had challenges recruiting enough nurses to cover all the care needed. Staffing assignments and emergency staffing protocols have been shifting nurses away from their normal duties and causing the need to backfill those positions with limited duration nurses and asking other agencies for relief nurses. We have had additional issues with nurses leaving the State Hospital but at times not knowing why due to lack of exit interviews which makes it harder to figure out how to support workforce retention. Over all we have lost a net of 8-12 Utilization Management RN's with another 15 moved to emergency staffing positions.

We applaud OHA and the Legislature's investment in community based alternatives to the State Hospital to help deal with increasing population against a limited workforce. We want to make sure that we don't see this as an either or proposition through. It will still take time for many of these community supports and alternatives to get up and running and in the meantime we need to continue investing in the current workforce. Incidents of staff abuse have become more prevalent in the last year and that has compounded with the both the staffing issues and impacts of increased need for beds.

We are asking the legislature to continue supporting the State Hospital and increase funding for additional positions to help with recruitment and retention of staff. There is an increased demand for healthcare professionals across the state and we will only continue to compete with other healthcare systems that are receiving millions of dollars of pandemic related funding who can continue to recruit nursing staff much easier and in a much more reactive way.

Thank you for your time.

Dan Torres
Political Coordinator
Oregon AFSCME