

Dear Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner Hayward, and Rayfield, Vice-Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

My name is Brandon Smithers, I work in Curry County, and I have served as a Patrol Sergeant for the Oregon State Police since 2021.

I want to write about the important role State Troopers play in public safety.

You'll find troopers throughout our state, keeping Oregonians safe: we're on our highways, we've been at the protests in Portland, we're there for floods and for fires, we've been at the riots at the Capitol — and we've been here throughout the pandemic.

But we need more State Troopers, now more than ever.

In 1980, there were over 600 troopers on the road, with a population of just 2.6 million. Today, Oregon's population is over 4.2 million, but we have only 402 troopers. We have nearly twice as many Oregonians, but less than ? of the troopers than we had 40 years.

Our low OSP staffing level puts Oregon second-to-last in our country.

As a result, large portions of our state highways and interstates cannot be patrolled 24/7. Senate Bill 211 will increase our staffing ratio to 15 troopers per 100,000 by 2030, which is the current national average.

As recent as yesterday 4-22-21 the Gold Beach Patrol Office staffing was at such a low level that a critical incident in the county north of us took all available troopers out of Curry County. This is a re-occurring issue with the GBO as I have Patrol Troopers involved in a variety of other aspects of the Oregon State Police. For instance one of the Patrol Troopers is a SWAT Team Member and is commonly gone from the area. Another is a Crash Reconstructionist leaving only two patrol troopers to cover their assigned shifts and possibly be called out on their time off for additional calls.

The solution is clear: the more State Troopers we have patrolling and enforcing laws in Oregon, the more lives we can save.

I request that you increase our state's investment in Oregon State Police for next biennium — and that you pass Senate Bill 211 to make clear that we must restore 24/7 trooper coverage on our highways.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your commitment to improving our state's investment in State Troopers.

Sincerely,
Brandon Smithers