

Monday, March 1, 2021

Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St SE  
Salem, OR 97301


Chair Gelser and members of the committee,

I am writing in support of SB 97 which would protect staff members who work with the Residential Facilities Ombudsman (RFO) from retaliation by their employers. As the Chair of the Residential Ombudsman and Public Guardian Advisory Board (ROBPGAB) as well as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I have seen the effects of mistreatment in group care settings for Individuals with Mental Health and Disability concerns. The Vital support provided by the RFO is needed to ensure that residents have recourse to restore their rights when violated. This bill will ensure that facility operators cannot threaten their own staff to withhold information vital to the RFO in discharging their duties.

As you may or may not be aware, many of the staff who work directly with residents provide deep support and often become close confidants to residents. These support workers also have relative low labor leverage to advocate for their own needs. This places staff members cooperating with RFO investigations in a terrible bind. They often have and want to provide information to the RFO staff but are in a precarious personal situation if they displease their employers – the same individuals who are being investigated. Current statute provides for protection for cooperating with investigations with RFO's sister program the Long Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) housed with the same agency.

I am strongly encouraging members of the committee to support this bill and move it along in the process. You have a chance to align programs within the agency and simultaneously improve the work of the RFO by granting it the protection it needs to gather information in their work. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Joseph M. Leykam, LCSW