



Chair Bynum, Vice Chair's Noble and Power, Members of the House Committee on Judiciary.

Oregon AFSCME would like to submit this testimony today on House Bill 4142. Oregon AFSCME represents over 32,000 Oregonians across the state including thousands of hospital workers from OHSU to the Oregon State Hospital to community hospitals like Good Shepard. Folks who work in the healthcare field, especially front-line hospital staff, have been through a very intense and traumatic time recently. While many people in Oregon were able to stay home and work, these folks showed up on the front lines and faced untold stress, trauma, and exposure to care for those in need.

When it comes to workplace assaults, Oregon AFSCME agrees with the goal of this bill, reducing the number of assaults that occur to hospital workers. We also know that this isn't a perfect solution or should be where the conversation ends. Simply providing a stronger offense often will not supplement the real need which is more staff to help provide services. Often folks who are violent in a healthcare setting are undergoing a mental health crisis and in many cases are in the hospital setting due to that mental health crisis. We are seeing an unfortunate but often unsurprising correlation between assault occurrence and severity tied in with staffing issues at many of these facilities. In places like the Oregon State Hospital, which relies on a number of limited duration, agency fill, and more recently the national guard, staff can change frequently which can put patients and staff and risk alike. At OHSU where staff isn't sufficient, we see hospital workers taking on more tasks leaving them overworked, stressed, and burnt out.

Oregon AFSCME plans to continue to look at this issue beyond just increasing penalties and looking at how to prevent these attacks. Our workers in hospitals believe there needs to be an increase in training for workers on de-escalation and personal safety. In addition, there needs to be a comprehensive look at the increase in violence on staff and should include workforce dynamics, behavioral health supports, and providing adequate support staff when it makes sense. We thank the sponsors of this bill for bringing this issue forward and are ready to work on other components mentioned today.

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