Dear Chair Holvey and members of the committee,

My name is Nastya Kline, they/them pronouns, and I am writing on behalf of myself.

I am currently working as an AFSCME organizer, but spent the last few years as a front line worker at Central City Concern. I am here to talk about how House Bill 4126 could have directly impacted my experience there, and supported me in continuing to do behavioral health work.

I worked the front desk at Central City Concern's Blackburn Center, which provides medical, mental health, and recovery services for Portland's most vulnerable populations. When COVID hit I became one of the primary COVID screeners at the front door, which put me in a really vulnerable position. I had people harass me and touch me. There were multiple incidents with weapons in front of the clinic, and I felt completely unprepared and untrained for dealing with those situations. It took me three months after a particularly traumatic harrassment situation, to get the appropriate managers to sit down with me and do an incident review. Whenever I brought up safety concerns, nothing seemed to change. I was left feeling completely disposable while putting myself at risk daily interacting with sick and COVID-symptomatic patients.

I decided to join efforts to unionize the Blackburn Center. We quickly reached a majority support of around 65%, and submitted cards for a union election.

Our upper management, previously very silent about the concerns we were expressing, then began an aggressive anti-union campaign. I recall a captive audience meeting in which an HR person mentioned that staff had been asking for COVID pay, but what we really should focus on is wearing our PPE properly. Management then held a series of anti-union events at the Blackburn Center, heavily staffed by management and HR folks. The events were catered and had the appearance of being well-funded, with lots of anti-union flyers and handouts with misleading information. No one from AFSCME was allowed into these events to provide a different side of the story. These events wrapped up with the CCC Executive Director and other members of the executive team holding a panel to talk about their experiences with unions. They each asked us to vote against unionizing, and played a video of our CEO and Chief People Officer formally talking about why we shouldn't unionize, and again asking us to vote no.

The support for the union dropped drastically after that, as staff became more nervous and uncomfortable. Our work environment felt increasingly , with some of the anti-union staff becoming actively hostile towards those of us who were unionizing. While we were unionizing to all come together, address needs, and provide better client care, management's messaging drove further wedges into our relationships and pitted us against each other.

Ultimately, we lost our union election. I believe things would have gone differently if management had not aggressively pushed anti-union rhetoric, and if legislation like HB 4126 had been in place. What we were asking for was simply a chance to have a seat at the table, and for our voices to be heard on the issues affecting us. We wanted to create a more sustainable workplace where staff turnover wasn't constant and clients were able to see the same providers and not sit on a waiting list for months to address urgent needs. We wanted accountability in place to ensure that we as workers had the support we needed.

House Bill 4126 would require employers like CCC to sign a contract when their workers want to organize, and be held accountable for their actions for the duration of the unionizing process. We can't afford continued union busting, we can't afford these growing rates of turnover and staff burnout, which is ultimately leading to more people on the streets and less people getting the medical and mental help they desperately need.

Please invest in our behavioral health workforce and support passing HB 4126.

Thank you!