

**DEB PATTERSON
STATE SENATOR/SENADORA ESTATAL
DISTRICT/DISTRITO 10**



OREGON STATE SENATE/SENADO DEL ESTADO DE OREGON

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and Honorable Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, State Senator from District 10. I am here to add my support to SB 403.

Oregon State Police provide a tremendous service to the people of Oregon and have done so for many years. Despite the significant population growth we have experienced, Oregon has fewer than one thousand troopers across the entire State. These officers patrol our State Highways, assist with protection of life and property during catastrophic wildfire events, and shore up law enforcement in counties without tax bases that provide for a Sheriff's department. They have done so even during the COVID pandemic, and they continue to be out there today on our highways and in our communities where each stop potentially puts their lives in danger. We owe a huge debt to the officers who put themselves on the front lines in each of our communities and across our state.

Due to the nature of the work of the Oregon State Police, each officer will likely experience several traumatic events in the line of duty. A study in 2019 showed that police are at the highest risk for suicide of any profession. This study even showed that "suicide is so prevalent in the profession that the number of police officers who died by suicide is more than triple that of officers who were fatally injured in the line of duty." These numbers are shocking and tragic and warrant the need for further discussion about mental health services available to our first responders.

Because of the traumatic nature of their work, a provision in their PERS account allows officers to retire at an earlier age than other general service employees if they so choose. When they do retire, however, they are no longer eligible to receive health insurance through PEBB, requiring them to look to the private marketplace to search for insurance coverage. Currently, all PERS retirees are eligible to enroll in PEBB offered plans; however, the cost, which must be paid by the employee, can be significant. Depending on the plan and whether the coverage for a partner or child is needed, these costs can exceed \$2,500 per month. In addition, premiums fluctuate from year to year, making it unpredictable for retirees to plan for cost increases. Currently, these premiums are only slightly below what any employee could expect to pay for a COBRA plan.

I believe that the way we treat our first responders says a lot about our community as a whole and not providing basic needs such as health insurance to those who have protected our communities is a disservice to the career that they have led. SB 420 would simply allow retired police officers with the Oregon State Police to retain their health insurance until they turn 65 and are eligible to move onto

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deb Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Patterson

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Medicare, bridging the coverage gap for them. It would also be a hiring incentive for those seeking to enter the profession. I urge your support of this bill.

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