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To: Members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

From: Pat Garrett, Sheriff Washington County
Oregon State Sheriffs' Association/Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police

Date: February 28, 2023

Re: HB 2296-Testimony-Support-Public Employees Retirement System-working after retirement

Chair Graber and members of the committee,

For the record, my name Pat Garrett, I am the Washington County Sheriff and I'm here today on behalf of Oregon State Sheriffs' Association (OSSA) and Oregon Association Chiefs of Police (OACP) in support of HB 2296.

I'd like to begin my testimony today by thanking Representative Graber for introducing this important measure.

Public safety, much like many other professions, has been severely impacted by a workforce crisis caused by a number of factors including mass retirements and individuals leaving the profession to pursue other work. To make matters worse, the ability to attract qualified candidates to fill these vacancies has been very challenging in the current environment. Once you are able to hire to fill a vacant position, long delays to access basic training classes means the ability of the individual to actually work solo (fill a post) takes a significant amount time. As you are probably aware, public safety professionals, specifically patrol and Corrections Deputies fill posts that are staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Even for a large agency like mine, being down a handful of positions can significantly impact the patrol and correctional services we provide. For small police agencies, and we have several of them in Oregon, workforce shortages can be debilitating.

In 2019 the Oregon Legislature passing SB 1049 which provided an opportunity for Oregon Public Retirement System (PERS) employers to hire back PERS retirees without an hour restriction. The ability to do this has assisted my Office and many other public safety agencies to maintain adequate service levels as agencies work to fill these critical positions in very trying circumstances. HB 2296 extends the sunset on SB 1049 allowing PERS employers to hire back PERS employees for critical positions including public safety.

Thank you for allowing me to share how allowing PERS retirees to continue work without hours restrictions has significantly benefited Washington County community members in public safety services and cost.

From a services perspective, this program minimizes service reductions we have had to make in jail operations and allows us to continue current 911 call response services.

As previously mentioned, like other agencies across the public safety sector, we are experiencing reduced applications and increased retirements. We are working hard to increase recruitment and return staffing levels to pre-pandemic levels. Last summer, I made the difficult and necessary decision to temporarily close a 64-bed housing unit in our jail because we do not have sufficient staff to operate our jail at full capacity. Having one housing unit closed increases releases of pre-sentenced adults in custody, due to overcrowding, who the courts determined should not be released because of the unacceptable risk they pose to our community if released.

Our office has a current workforce of 556 total fulltime staff, including 28 staff who work after retirement as allowed by Senate Bill 1049. Nine of the 28 work-after-retirement staff are uniformed staff who work in our jail. They have been incredibly important in our ability to maintain jail services without further service reductions. In addition, 15 of the 28 work-after-retirement staff are uniformed staff are assigned in Patrol, or investigate major crimes, allowing us to continue current service levels in these important areas.

From a cost and staff wellness perspective, a retirement departure today can mean mandatory overtime tomorrow and many days thereafter for remaining staff. In addition, continuing employment of staff members after retirement defers the initial \$22,000 cost to equip a new patrol deputy, and the initial \$17,000 cost to equip a new a new jail deputy. Other significant costs are deferred or avoided, like the 10 months of continuous training required before a patrol deputy or jail deputy is capable to work independently of a coach or trainer at their side.

I wish I could say there is a light at the end of the tunnel in terms of recruitment and retention of Public Safety Professionals. It appears that in the foreseeable future, recruitment and retention of these professionals will continue to be challenging.

In closing, I urge you to support HB 2296. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm happy to answer your questions.