



Chair Grayber, Vice-chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans,

My name is Carren Pratt, and I work as a Mental Health Registered Nurse at Oregon State Hospital. I've worked here for one year. I chose to work at the Oregon State Hospital for the benefits and the competitive pay with the incentive pay that was present upon hire. My day-to-day workload consists of engaging with high-risk individuals that can and have had violent outbursts towards people and inanimate objects due to behavioral health issues. We have many staff that have had major injuries from patients attacking them causing them to be hospitalized and causing long stretches of time away from work. I give them medications as prescribed, communicate with them while they're stable and while they're escalated to attempt to regulate them. To prevent an unwanted violent incident.

Most of the patients at the State hospital are .370 patients; Meaning that they are here for a crime committed in the community. I have worked both in a maximum-security prison and at the state hospital. From personal experience I can tell you that the prison is safer for staff. Due to the violent nature of the patients at the state hospital when a patient is a danger to others, staff is limited in what they are allowed to do to protect themselves and the other staff and patients. This is cause in and of itself for undue stress and a high risk for bodily injury and mental anguish.

The pandemic has affected my mental health by increasing my anxiety. I have had anxiety for most of my life, but the pandemic and the precautions we've had to do for the last 3 years has exponentially increased my anxiety levels. The long-term effects on my work would be that I need to take better care of my mental health, thus utilizing FMLA/OFLA to take the time I need for mental recovery.

Due to the nature of the population we work with, it increases my stress levels thus increasing my anxiety. My mental health has increased my burnout. Which in turn has affected my personal relationships by either losing them or feeling like I'm in constant strife with my loved ones. Which can and has bled into my working relationships. If we increase the salary of workers and lower the amount of time for retirement to kick in then it would incentivize people to work here as they can have a comparable wage to other companies and retire at a reasonable age. Especially, with the fact that people who work here for 30 years are more likely to pass away within the first year of retirement. Nearly 10% of our workforce is temporary or travelers that make significantly higher wages than permanent floor staff.

HB 2701 would create a new "high risk/high stress" category in PERS for OSH employees and 911 operators, allowing them to retire earlier with full benefits, as well as receive an increase in their final average salary. It also lowers the age for OSH workers and 911 operators related to when Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan (OPSRP workers) can retire with full benefits from 65 to the later of either 60 years old or 5 years of service. Passage of this bill is important because it would help with my personal life by taking away financial stress caused by underpayment related to the cost of living in the community rising exponentially at an alarming



rate. Additionally, workers can enjoy the later part of their life with a less likelihood of fatal diseases. We can be relatively healthy and focus on ourselves and our health rather than that of everyone else for once. All while still being able to enjoy our retirement because we have the means and opportunity to do so. I believe we should be added to this level of PERS because we are as, and if not, more dangerous than the prison system without the same level of benefits given to staff. In a way it makes me, and other employees feel as if our safety and our work is not as valued as the prison systems. Especially, when a significant amount of our patient population are considered criminals with violent crimes per the judicial system

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this bill and I hope you vote yes on HB 2701.

Carren Pratt, MHRN