



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

My name is Matthew Freeman, and I work as Registered Nurse at The Oregon State Hospital. I've worked here for 6 years. I currently work on a unit that focuses on transitioning to the community, however I first started on a maximum-security unit; so, you could say that I have seen both sides of the hospital. When I got out of nursing school, working as a psych nurse was not my first choice, however, I have grown to love this field of nursing. I feel that this population is underserved and that I am doing my part to give back to the community. This population needs more help and retaining staff at The Oregon State hospital is important to their treatment and our safety.

The day to day here at the Oregon State Hospital can be unpredictable and change in a heartbeat. When emergencies occur, we must count on our staffing numbers. When staffing numbers are low it can be scary and stressful. I see so many staff start working here and quit very soon after. It is essential to have the benefits to retain our staff, to give them what they deserve for working in such a high stress environment. When I walk into work, I sometimes wonder if I am going to walk out the same way at the end of the day.

Since I started working here, staffing has always been difficult at the hospital, but the pandemic made it worse, much worse. I was never mandated until we hit the pandemic. As you can imagine, being forced to stay an extra shift, under these stressful situations can be hard on the body. Not only is this harmful to our health, but it also affects our lives outside of work.

Things like burnout are a real problem here and the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this. I have noticed this affecting me at times over the past few years. Some days it was difficult to come to work. It affected my mood and my relationships with others. This made me realize how important self-care really is.

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 working in this high stress environment would be difficult to continue doing for an entire career. Which is why lowering the retirement age is essential to those who risk their lives to work here. When I went through nursing school, I never would have thought that I would be put in these kinds of dangerous situations. I truly believe that staff here deserve this bill being passed with all that they go through.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this bill and I hope you vote yes on HB 2701 with the -3 amendment.

Matthew Freeman