



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

My name is Dr. Kyle Bowers, and I work as a staff psychiatrist at Oregon State Hospital. I've worked here for 7 months. I have worked during this time on one of the maximum acuity units at the hospital. I chose to work at Oregon State Hospital as there is a need for psychiatrists to work with this population of patients, and from what I have witnessed in the past few years, there has been a precipitous decline in the workforce that is able and willing to work in a high acute setting due to increased violence, acuity, and burnout. I am writing in support of HB 2701 which will help retain the workforce we have. It will also attract new talent that is much needed at the Hospital.

On a typical day, I am available from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm for any issues that arise on the unit. I am on the unit multiple times a day, either for meetings with patients, meetings with staff members, or to assess follow-ups for patients in locked seclusion. At all times, there are patients wandering in the milieu, often who are highly acute and symptomatic. Whenever I am traversing the unit to meet with patients, I have at least one staff member to escort me for safety. Oftentimes, patients can seek out the physician in an aggressive manner if they are placed on involuntary medications, if a hearing does not go the way they expected, or if they are demanding to be released. On two occasions thus far in my employment, I have been nearly assaulted by a patient. Both times were relatively unexpected, and I was lucky to have staff nearby for protection, but this has definitely made me even more cautious on the unit.

Since the pandemic, the number of admissions to the unit and the relative acuity of the patient population appear to have drastically increased, and this has led to staff (nurses and technicians) turnover and burnout. Without regular staffing, this can affect the quality of the care patients receive, as having regular staffing can make patient engagement easier. Working in this setting as a physician, with constant risk to personal safety, has led to feelings of burnout, which has affected personal relationships and responsibilities outside of work. HB2701 would help to recognize the daily struggles of working in a highly acute setting, and potentially allow for the recruitment of qualified staff to ease the workload.

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 allows me to know that I will be better compensated and better able to care for my family based on the work in the acute and dangerous environment that I am doing. Passage of this bill would likely help alleviate the staffing issues, and will provide some comfort for those already working in this environment. Physicians should be included in HB2701 as working in this environment subjects us to potential physical harm on a daily basis, as we are working with a population that is deemed to be unsafe to the general public due to untreated behavioral issues.

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

Kyle Bowers, MD