

To: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

From: Jamie Heitz

Date: March 30, 2023

RE: HB 2701 High Risk, High Stress

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Thuy, and members of the committee,

My name is Jamie Heitz and I am testifying in support HB 2701 High Risk, High Stress to retain and recruit workers at the Oregon State Hospital (OSH). I am a member of SEIU Local 503 writing on my own time. I am a resident of Salem. I began my career at OSH as a MHT and later worked as a AS1.

I started at OSH back in 2010 on the Portland campus as a MHT on Noc shift. Since then I have worked day and swing shift as well on high acute units. Currently, I'm working as a AS1 in the staffing office. Through the years working here I have seen some horrible attacks and heard the cries for help on the radio. I personally have witness a MHT get stabbed in the temple with a pen, MHTs getting choked, punched kicked, and spit on. I have also myself been hit in the head and spit on as well as numerous injured responding to assault on my co-workers.

The HB 2701 bill is extremely important and the staff at OSH deserve it. Not only would it help retain the staff we have now who go through stressful situations everyday, but this would help recruit and retain now staff. Working in the staffing office we hear the codes on the unit and are putting staff out "CI" Critical Incident daily. I have seen numerous staff quit due to the job being too dangerous. Even the agency staff we have feel the same way.

My job today entails staffing the Oregon State Hospital, hiring overtime, taking callouts, putting people off who have been injured and approving time off. Although I don't have any patient contact I hear the codes all the time and see the repercussion of the code with the amount of staff that goes home every day. My job is rewarding when I don't have to put a staff out due to being injured and when we are actually staffed with enough MHTs LPNs and RNs which rarely happened these days.

In my experience as a former MHT, this bill would allow staff who work an extremely stressful job to retire early and get a better benefit package. I have seen so many staff work there 30 years just to pass away a couple years into retirement. I have seen so many staff have permanent damage from this job and sometimes aren't even able to continue to work in the compacity as a MHT LPN or RN on the floor any more due to their injuries.

I believe HB2701 would improve the moral at the hospital, increase the amount of staffing will to stay employed here and bring more staff to the hospital that we so badly need.

OSH workers deserve improved retirement benefits that recognize the dignity and value of their years of service. These benefits are vital for the well-being of OSH workers who must often retire early due to the immense physical, emotional, and mental toll of their jobs.

For too long, OSH workers have been an unrecognized and undervalued part of Oregon's healthcare system. Adequate staffing and secure retirement benefits would begin to provide the minimum recognition of their work.

In closing, I ask the members of this committee to support HB 2701.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jamie Heitz