

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

From: Aaron Surette

29 March 2023

RE: HB 2701 High Risk, High Stress

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

My name is Aaron Surette and I am testifying in support of 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 here on my own time.

I moved across the country, from New York, to come work for the State of Oregon at the state hospital. Prior to moving here, I volunteered & served as an EMT and first responder, since before Covid. Understand clearly that the risks & stress of working at OSH, are far greater than those I experienced on the streets as an EMT; & I've responded to some unspeakable scenes in NY during my service.

I am a resident of Salem. I began my career at OHA-OSH as an OS2 and later worked as an MHTT & PA1. I view my civil service duties seriously; & am proud to serve the great state of Oregon, looking forward to many more years of service.

- PA1 entailed calling or meeting with recently admitted patients. On any given day, I meet or contact 20-50 patients.
- OS2 entails personally assisting patients in a Locked Unit. On any given day, I work with 25 patients.
- MHTT entails personally assisting patients in a Locked Unit. On any given day, I work with 20-100 patients.

Unfortunately, despite the investments the Legislature has made in mental and behavioral health services and workforce, more needs to be done. Most of your employees do not make living wages; which is further insulted by DAS & Leadership's abuse of "legal" Mandates. Make no mistake, these mandates are modern slavery. How can people be expected to take care of themselves if they are not allowed to leave work at the end of a day; or are called in when they are supposed to be off. How is one expected to maintain a life of their own, follow a medicine regimen, or secure & maintain childcare stability, when the state threatens to fire them and destroy their family. How are we expected to hold a steady second job; when we could be called in, or asked to stay longer, at any minute. The lack of compassion for fellow Civil Servants is disgusting. What's worse is it is directly, negatively affecting Oregon's youth, the children.

Our workers are expected to manage emergencies and work through traumatic events during which they are exposed to a high risk of harm. The physical and mental toll these occupations have on workers can exponentially decrease their ability to work until the regular age of

retirement. Oregon State Hospital workers and 911 operators deserve to receive compensation for the hazardous working conditions.

Support of this bill is but a band-aid on a severed artery. We need a serious overhaul of how Oregon treats its own employees. We need Living Wages. We need to be able to Retire, with access to benefits fitting our Daily Trauma & Risk/Exposure.

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 Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Tran, and members of the committee, to support HB 2701 High Risk, High Stress. This bill is a necessary stop-gap until the real work can be done.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

*Aaron Surette*