

Salem Police Employees Union

February 5, 2024

To: House Committee on Business & Labor

From: Scotty Nowning, President

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

I have been a police officer for nearly 20 years starting in Arizona before I joined the Salem Police Department. I am currently a detective working child abuse cases and am also president of the Salem Police Employees Union, which currently represents our officers and detectives.

Salem Police attempted a few years ago to get sergeants into the union. This was supported unanimously by all 24 sergeants in the department but it was rejected by the city. This has created some issues that HB 4115 will hopefully address.

Sergeants play an important role in our department – they are our shift leaders working with officers and interacting with our community. At the same time, they are also responding to the same calls.

Recently, we had a shooting involving both a sergeant and an officer. I responded to the scene to work with the officer to ensure that procedure was followed and that he was connected to an attorney to work through the process. The sergeant sat in a room all alone with no guidance and no legal support. The shooting was later deemed justified. Other supervisors generally do not face these same dangers as being involved in shootings so we have learned through these incidents that sergeants also need those same protections as those of us in a collective bargaining unit.

In the past few years, we have had openings for sergeant which produce very few experienced candidates willing to apply for these positions. Officers are having to make the very tough decision to continue with the protections and benefits provided by our union, or advancing in their careers. We are seeing this issue in many communities across Oregon and it is not good for accountability in our public safety system. We need strong and experienced leaders among our law enforcement and also within the community.

Leader Helfrich previously mentioned the 13 agencies that already have a working system with sergeants in their unions. I would point out that of the top 10 cities in population in Oregon, only four of those cities have agencies where sergeants are in the union. The remaining 7 city agencies where sergeants are unionized all in smaller cities ranging from #11 Albany to #46 Coos Bay with a population under 16,000 and a police agency with 22 officers. If a city like Coos Bay can make it work, we think cities like Salem, Eugene, and Hillsboro can also make it work.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide my thoughts and support for House Bill 4115.