



From: Jennifer Cash, OSH Workers, Salem Campus. Activity Coordinator

Date: 02/05/2024

RE: HB 4045 Public Safety Workforce Stabilization Act of 2024

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

My name is Jeniffer Cash , I am writing in support of HB 4045-1 Public Safety Workforce Stabilization to retain and recruit workers at the Oregon State Hospital (OSH) and 911 telecommunicators.

I began my career at OSH at the Salem Campus in 2016 as a Mental Health Therapy Technician and later worked as an Activities Coordinator. My job today entails Making sure patients get in there off unit activities and classes with the clinicians within the secure perimeter of the campus. On any given day, I work with 20 patients per hour, 6 hours of my 10 hour shift.

During the last hours of activities with patients off the units, a shift occurred where I was the only Activities Coordinator present on a unit that had patients. Two unit staff members stayed with me. The patients sought assistance for various activities, and as I began to assist one patient, another became agitated with a fellow patient. This individual jumped up, pushed a table, and then proceeded to jump over the table and punch the other patients. The rest of the staff immediately called a code, which is an announcement made over the intercom asking for help from anyone available.

I attempted to separate the patients, but one was sitting on top of the other, continuously punching their face. Unfortunately, I wasn't strong enough to pull them apart. As soon as the patient heard the code being called, their attack escalated from using their fists to using their feet, stomping on the other patient's face. It is important to note that both patients involved were males, while all the staff present before the code were females. After the patient finished stomping on the other patient's face, they walked into another room. I had to quickly close the doors and keep them separated.

What started as a code for assistance quickly turned into a medical code due to the severity of the injuries. The scene in front of me was indescribable, with blood scattered all over the place. This incident has not only affected my professional life but also my personal life. Even recounting this story is challenging for me. However, I must return to work every day and provide treatment as if nothing happened.

Unfortunately, despite the investments the Oregon Legislature has made in mental and behavioral health services, more needs to be done. The underfunding of services and critical staffing needs impacts the safety of the workforce and the quality of care for patients. This leads to workplace injuries and illnesses for state hospital workers, making the state's psychiatric institute the most dangerous place to work.

To be able to retire at a younger age would mean so much. It would give us hope of being able to enjoy part of lives, after giving so much of ourselves.

The reality is that many of my colleagues don't live long after retirement or carry with them an immense amount of physical and psychological trauma. With a lower retirement age and enhanced benefits, I would like to note that since my employment here at OSH I have been invited to 4 memorials of staff who have passed away. 3 had just retired, and one was almost retired. I am 54. I do have a fear that I will die before I get to see part of my retirement or that I will only be able to have 1 or 2 years of it.

OSH workers on the secure campus, like me, deserve improved retirement benefits that recognize the dignity and value of our years of service. These benefits are vital for the wellbeing of OSH workers who must often retire early due to the immense physical, emotional, and mental toll of their jobs. I ask members of the committee to fully support HB 4045. This bill will immensely help the state's psychiatric and nursing workforce in the secure psychiatric facility. We need the Legislature to support the workers at OSH so we can continue to do our jobs: serving patients.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jennifer Cash