



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

From: Renée Schrock, Behavioral Health Specialist

Date: 2/6/2024

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 Renée Schrock, and I am writing in support of HB 4045 Public Safety Workforce Stabilization to retain and recruit workers at the Oregon State Hospital (OSH) and 911 telecommunicators.

I work at Oregon State Hospital's Salem campus as a Behavioral Health Specialist. My job entails doing therapy groups and 1:1 therapy within the secure perimeter of campus. On any given day, I spend time on my living unit including in close proximity to patients who are prone to dysregulation, heightened paranoia, and delusions.

My unit has had acute patients who require a staff assigned to be in their proximity the whole day, and my unit currently has patients who are defined as a "701" or "highly dangerous." These types of patients place another layer of stress and vigilance on staff who are fully taxed with providing safety and support to a 25-patient living unit.

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 impact 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. This is your opportunity to properly compensate state hospital employees for the critical services they provide to psychotic patients.

I believe HB 4045-1 would significantly improve the recruitment and retention issues since these are two ongoing HR problems. Staff would have more reason to endure that heightened challenges when they know their supportive retirement plan is commensurate with their stress load. I started at the hospital in March 2023, so I am a newer employee. When I saw the working demands of OSH staff, I was surprised and at times appalled that they haven't been

supported with a lower retirement age. Earlier in my career, I worked over a decade at Oregon Youth Authority campuses where the security protocols and volatile clientele parallel OSH.

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,

Renée Schrock