



February 5, 2024,

Chair Grayber, Vice-chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans,

For the record, my name is Rachel Kulmer, and I'm a member of AFSCME Local 3295, the Oregon State Hospital Nurses. I want to share my story and ask for your support for HB 4045. This bill creates a new "Hazardous" category within PERS for employees of the Oregon State Hospital who have direct contact with patients and 911 operators who directly work with or manage emergency or traumatic events in the regular course of work. This bill has various components but I want to shed light on one specific portion which directly impacts the life of my coworkers who are also your state employees.

The work we perform at OSH is unique and comes with its challenges. I work directly with psychiatric patients with severe and persistent mental illnesses who are facing legal charges. Many of these patients can be physically violent toward their peers or staff. I have witnessed violence frequently over the 8 years I've worked at OSH. I have been hit by a patient, and this treatment takes a psychological toll. Our jobs are not easy and without many incentives, I can see why recruitment is difficult.

By creating this new category for OSH and 911 telecommunicators, we could attract folks into the workforce who engage 24/7 in work that is high-risk and causes high stress. I often feel burnt out, both at work and at home, and find that it's hard to maintain the same level of service while experiencing these issues. Many workers quit due to the constant burnout from these conditions, and increased retirement benefits could work to increase our staffing levels.

It's important to understand that working in an environment like this, especially long-term, is highly stressful and detrimental to the worker's health. I have heard of multiple retired staff members dying of cardiac issues just months after retirement. I can specifically think of at least three cases, and I'm sure there's been more. Working at OSH is a highly stressful job that can traumatize a person psychologically and damage their physical health due to chronic stress. The people who choose to continue working here do it because we feel passionate about helping underserved Oregonians. Please consider approving this important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time,

Rachel Kulmer