



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

From: Randy Davis

Date: February 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 Randy Davis, 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 am a resident of Salem. I began my career at the Oregon State Hospital (OSH) as a Mental Health Therapist (MHT) in 1994 as an agency contractor and took a permanent position in 1997 in the Children Adolescent Treatment Services(CATS). The MHT position is the primary the direct care position at OSH. I have worked in all areas of OSH as an MHT in my career. In 2014 I was honored to be part of the Team that started the Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Department. This new position I am a Staff Support Coach (SSC) that trains staff in CPS and OSH's internally developed Safe Together program that is the primary program to teach OSH staff how to verbally engage with patients and how to contain patients safely physically during behavioral emergencies. Every day in Salem the part of OSH that takes most of the direct admissions staff encounter patient that are unstable, and many times can be physically aggressive.

In my current role as SSC, I spend most of my day helping staff practice physical containment and, on the units, helping staff to contain patients and how to use verbal de-escalation techniques. I could go on and on of the daily occurrences where there is a behavioral emergency that require staff to contain patients that have been assaultive or have destroyed property. Every day, we the front-line workers know that at any moment on any day they could be assaulted or injured while trying to contain an aggressive patient to keep all of the patients they serve safe.

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.

In my almost thirty years of working at OSH I have been punched kicked and spit on by patients experiencing psychological crisis. This is a usual experience for all MHTs or as they are called "line staff", new employees are often told it is not a matter of getting assaulted or verbally abused it is when it will happen. This constant fear of assault has led to high employee turnover and a reputation as an unsafe workplace. The fear having to physically contain an aggressive patient is always on the minds of every MHT and staff working in the secure perimeter. I have watched my friends and co-workers have almost everybody part injured. As I watch my co-workers continue to work traumatized and injured trying to get to retirement age or years of service. As they limp towards retirement knowing that several of their friends got to retire, and then pass away soon after. This is a thought that runs through the mind everyone's that works in the secure perimeter.

As I am about to retire, I look back over the years and think about all my friends who made it to thirty (30) years broken and traumatized and the funerals I have attend shortly after they retired sometimes within months. I then think about all the MHTs that I have mentored or trained in the last ten (10) years in my current positions and worry if they will even get to retire and if they must do thirty (30) years how much time will they have after retirement.

I have great hope that HB 4045 will lower the retirement requirements for all OSH staff that work in the secure perimeter. I truly believe it will give now the folks working some light at the end of the tunnel and for future employee's knowledge that retirement from OSH is not something that is event that will only be short lived after all of stress of working at 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 4045-1. 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,

Randy Davis

February 6, 2024