

January 30, 2025

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 588.

My name is Sean Ellis, and I live in Clackamas County. This matter is deeply personal to me and my family. We don't want other families to experience what we have when filing a disability claim with PERS.

In November 2006, I achieved my childhood dream of becoming a police officer. I remember, as a kid, playing in a park in Northeast Portland when an officer handed me a Trail Blazers basketball card. As I grew older, a strong desire to serve my community led me to law enforcement. To this day, I believe police officers have the chance every day to make a positive impact on someone's life.

One of the highlights of my career was mentoring Reserve Officers—volunteers who often aspired to become full-time officers. In November, 2013, I responded to a call with a one of these Reserve Officers and both of our lives changed forever. You see, during this call, the Reserve Officer riding with me that day was shot by a man who was lying in wait for us to arrive on scene. I cannot put into words what it was like to find the person I arrived on the call with mortally wounded, lying in the street. The Reserve Officer passed away the following day, and I can assure you this chain of events has had a profound impact on my life ever since.

In November 2019, I was diagnosed with PTSD. After five years in a detective unit, I had returned to patrol but began noticing changes in my behavior and mood, both at work and home. I felt I was treating people on calls in ways that were not like me. My youngest son once said, "Dad, you don't ever smile anymore." That broke my heart and made me realize I needed to make a change, both for myself and my family.

In September 2020, I filed a workers' compensation claim for PTSD, which was accepted without denial or extended review. I entered a treatment program with the goal of returning to work. However, as time went on, my symptoms persisted, and I had to accept that PTSD was

something I would live with. My family and I adjusted our lives accordingly, planning activities around my triggers, using medication and noise-canceling headphones at my sons' sporting events, and managing situations to minimize the toll on my mental health.

In March 2021, I applied for PERS disability, but my claim was denied in December 2021. My wife and I hired an attorney and filed an appeal. Meanwhile, my Social Security disability claim was accepted without denial or delay, and approved within a year. Yet, even now—three years later—PERS has yet to make a decision on my appeal.

During this time, the financial strain on my family has been immense. In September, 2021, my law enforcement career ended as I ran out of PTO and the city I worked for separated from me. Although my workers' compensation benefits continued, we lost medical insurance through my employer, and I had to secure costly health insurance for my wife and two boys. The constant delays and lack of resolution from PERS has only compounded our stress and uncertainty, making it harder to focus on my treatment and recovery.

It's clear that PERS lacks accountability and fails to recognize PTSD as a valid work-related injury, unlike workers' compensation. This is unacceptable for first responders who are exposed to trauma daily while serving their communities.

Senate Bill 588 is critical to ensuring that first responders and their families are supported during times of need. It will hold PERS accountable for resolving claims in a timely and fair manner, allowing individuals to focus on their health and families instead of endless delays and uncertainty.

Thank you for listening to my testimony. I urge the committee to support this important legislation to protect and support first responders and their families.

Sincerely,

Sean Ellis

