

February 17, 2025

**Representative Dacia Grayber, Chair
House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards**

RE: Support HB 3363

Chair Grayber, members of the committee, my name is Kate Oldfield. I am a Correctional Counselor & Security Plus President for AFSCME local 2376-02. I hold a Master's degree in Clinical Forensic Psychology. I work for the Oregon Department of Corrections, located at Columbia River Correctional Institution in Portland. I am a constituent of Washington County. More important than any of the professional titles I have previously mentioned, I am a mother. A mother of two teenage daughters. It is the title of mother that outranks all others and guides every action I take, both personally and professionally. It is that title that has brought me here today and pushed me to set aside my fear of public speaking and spend one of the precious paid days off that I have in order to accept the two minutes before this esteemed committee to discuss the unsafe & treacherous working conditions I and all DOC line staff face every day.

I have worked at Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI) since 2016, first as a contractor & now as permanent staff. I have always wanted to work with the forensic population. I love my job. The work done inside all Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) institutions reaches every corner & border of the state of Oregon. When I started, I was a single mother of two small children. I remember telling my mother that I was going to be working in a male prison. I was SO excited (and a little scared). She was just scared. After my first week all my fear was gone, taken away by the officers and other represented staff who trained me, protected me, and ensured I came home safe every night to my children. These people became my second family. When I call for help, my work family literally comes running - without a question. "Oldfield to control, I need responders." 6 words and help arrives. We actually put our lives in each other's hands. Every day, we make this commitment to each other and because of this commitment, I have come home safely 2,210 nights. I am an outlier, so far. This commitment crosses all institutions. We honor the trust forged inside the razor wire. We live the promise to all Oregonians made in the mission statement of the department.

If you were to ask me how many words need to be said by representatives of staff to management and administration to get help, I would have to say I don't know. We are still calling for help and waiting for responders. We have called for help to fill 50% staffing vacancies for security and medical staff. We have begged for increased mental health staffing as the acuity of our population triples. We are charged with keeping those in custody safe. We actively work to reduce the number of new victims. The most recent data from 2024 shows that Oregon has the lowest recidivism rate in the United States at 13%. The data shows that those who interact directly and daily with Adults in Custody (AICs) are upholding the promise we made in the mission statement. Our communities are safer, the incarceration cycle is being broken, and those once incarcerated are becoming voting constituents as our neighbors. Those in management and administration parade the "lowest recidivism in the country" trophy as evidence of their "good work" and "stewardship" across the world. They are able to do so because of the represented staff. We are the front line. We do the work.

How are represented staff honored and repaid by those taking credit for our work? The same represented staff whose life expectancy post retirement is 59 years old versus the average of 75. 16 years less of life is our repayment. Divorce and addiction rates through the roof is our repayment. Mandatory overtime and our children looking at empty seats at dinner tables and special events is our repayment.

We are the only state agency that cannot use the 40 hours of inclement weather leave afforded to every other agency. Last week I had to choose between risking my life to drive from Forest Grove to CRCI or use my vacation time. Represented staff are not allowed to work from home even if able. Managers & administrators are allowed to stay safely at home and be paid while keeping all paid leave. I have a week long vacation coming up that has been planned for a year and instead of looking forward to being allowed to relax and be with my family, I'm stressed about getting a cold or needing to take a day off to take my child to the doctor because I used 16 hours to stay off treacherous roads last week. I spent 8 years of my life obtaining my MS in Clinical Forensic Psychology to better help those in my care, but I personally don't have the ability to use my leave time to seek regular mental health care. Despite everything I have shared, I will continue to honor my promise to you and all Oregonians to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior, but when will management and administration uphold their promise to us? When will "staff wellness" become more than a hollow promise?

My oldest daughter will be able to vote in the next election, and she will remember those missed dance recitals, school events, and sick days I couldn't take off. She will remember missing her mother. Hopefully, she will also remember the importance that I place on investing in people as they build more skills.

I am simply asking you to invest in us. Please support HB 3363.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kate Oldfield

AFSCME Local 2376-02
Security Plus President and Chief Steward