

March 13, 2025

Sen. Anthony Broadman, Cochair

Rep. Paul Evans, Cochair

Subcommittee on Public Safety of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

RE: HB 5004

Cochairs Broadman and Evans, and members of the Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety

My name is Patricia (Trish) Houtz, and I have worked for the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) since September 1, 2006.

I have worked many positions over the past 19 years. One of those being recruitment for Security at EOIC. During the 10 years that I assisted in that position, we would request the list of potential hires. Those lists typically would include up to 80 or more applicants. We could fill all our open positions easily and had the opportunity to hire in what we called the "double fill", having more than 1 staff in the same position number waiting for an opening. Overtime was at a minimum and almost unheard of.

Today, I work at Two Rivers Correctional Facility (TRCI), and I assist in the meet and greet events with hopes to get applicants to attend and qualify for security positions. The pendulum has swung the other way, and DOC is no longer the employer of choice. The budget cannot withstand many more years of overtime in the amounts that we currently have. People in my community know how hard the work is, and they want more work life balance.

One of the possible fixes to attract applicants was to move the bottom pay for the officers to higher steps enticing the applicants due to competitive hiring in Umatilla County. What we have not done is raise the pay for the staff that have been at the top step, which would give them a reason to stay. These topped out staff are leaving with knowledge and experience that is hard to replace with new staff, and it takes a while to train them.

The health services area is also another section that needs to be looked at, closely. The nursing crisis during COVID created a domino effect with demands for nurses. DOC has not been able to bounce back from this deficit of nurses. Currently, we use contract nurses as a band aid to help the DOC nurses, but this is expensive, and the contract nurses are limited to the duties they can currently perform. They do not get enough training. Raising the wages of the nurses in DOC so that DOC is competitive with other employers would assist in hiring for these open positions in all 12 Institutions, but I think that it will especially help Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution (EOIC) and Two Rivers Correctional Institution (TRCI).

As a member of the DOC Statewide Wellness Council, I believe asking the Legislature for support to ensure that our staff and their wellness is a priority. Numerous staff, both security and security plus, working long hard hours falls well below the expectations of wellness.

Please invest in the staffing of DOC and add to the Governor's Recommended Budget for DOC in HB 5004.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to speak on this important matter.

Patricia Houtz

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