

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
Good morning, for the record, my name is Tom Donaldson, and I have worked for the Department of Corrections for over 25 years. I am writing to share my concerns about the state of the department, specifically at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF). Some of these issues may sound familiar, as I have raised them before.

As you know, CCCF is located in Wilsonville, OR—one of the most expensive places to live in the state. Over the 18 years I have worked here, the cost of living has increased by over 25%, while our salaries have not kept pace. In the past, we competed for employees with surrounding counties that offer higher wages and better benefits. Now, we are also competing with private companies like Amazon and Google, making recruitment nearly impossible. The few employees we do manage to hire often leave quickly for better pay and improved working conditions elsewhere.

Currently, staff at CCCF are being mandated to work an additional 16 hours of overtime per week—totaling approximately 768 extra hours per year away from their families. If I were there in person, I imagine one of you would ask, "What is the department doing to fix this?" The answer: aside from hiring a full-time recruiter who is struggling under these impossible conditions, nothing.

When we requested an alternative work schedule, it was dismissed as not meeting the threshold of importance. The department has also stopped allowing staff to retire and then rehire, despite this being a proven strategy to retain experienced employees. I believe the use of retirees should be reconsidered, just as it was for Director Reese.

The number one issue at CCCF is that staff are no longer considered the department's most important asset. That is why employees are leaving. The solution is simple: prioritize staff. Provide the dedicated employees who have spent years in service with a respectable wage and paid medical benefits upon retirement. While we appreciate new technology initiatives—especially body cameras, which would likely reduce false PREA complaints and save money in tort claims—none of it matters if we do not have boots on the ground.

Additionally, we now have the GIPA report and an inmate council consisting of over 20 inmates who meet with management monthly to discuss improvements. However, real change will only happen when staff concerns are addressed, and their well-being is made a priority. There just aren't enough of us to do all the work.

The dangerously low staffing levels are causing more call-ins because staff are exhausted, leading to institutional lockdowns that force us to cancel programs for the population, cancel visitations with their families, and reduce time inmates spend out of their cells and in the yard. When we are forced to do this, it is understandable when there are more disciplinary issues. Everyone needs a change of environment. How does this support the department's mission? In closing, we need the support of this committee to be able to do the job we were hired for. Please invest in the workforce at DOC. Add to the Governor's Recommended Budget for DOC in HB 5004.

Sincerely,

Tom Donaldson
Security Member of AFSCME Local 405