



March 18, 2025

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Javadi and Nelson, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB 2203, which will address the critical challenges faced by behavioral health workers in Oregon and strengthen our behavioral health system.**

My name is Alberto Gallegos and I am providing testimony on behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Oregon. SEIU Oregon is composed of SEIU Local 503 and SEIU Local 49, which together represent over 87,000 people. Local 49 represents private sector janitors, property service workers, light manufacturing, and healthcare workers; while Local 503 represents homecare workers, private nonprofit workers, in-home childcare providers, nursing home workers, and state and local government employees.

Oregon is in the midst of an addiction and mental health crisis, but without investing in our behavioral health workforce, we will never truly make progress for those in need. These workers play a vital role in supporting our loved ones and neighbors, yet they continue to face unsafe conditions, low pay, and insufficient training. The majority of facilities remain dangerously understaffed, leading to unsafe situations where workers are left alone with patients for extended hours, often overnight, with little to no support. This puts both workers and patients at risk.

HB 2203 takes meaningful action by implementing recommendations from the Joint Task Force on Improving the Safety of Behavioral Health Workers. It requires behavioral health employers, mobile crisis teams, and emergency shelters to develop written safety plans and protocols to protect workers and patients. It also mandates safety training for workers, covering key topics such as the employer's safety plan, de-escalation techniques, and reporting options to address safety concerns.

To further support compliance and improve safety, HB 2203 provides grants to employers through the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) for conducting risk assessments and ensuring safe work environments. Importantly, any newly constructed behavioral health facility that receives public funding will be required to incorporate worker safety features into its design.

The bill also addresses staffing concerns by empowering workers with additional safety measures. Behavioral health employers will be required to offer communication devices to workers who may be alone with patients or allow workers to request a second person to be present during high-risk situations.



Service Employees International Union – Oregon State Council

Without these essential changes, we risk losing more experienced and dedicated professionals who can no longer endure unsafe conditions. A stronger, safer behavioral health system is key to addressing Oregon’s mental health and addiction crisis.

SEIU Oregon urges the Committee to support HB 2203 to ensure that Oregon’s behavioral health workforce has the protection, resources, and respect they deserve.

Thank you,

Alberto Gallegos
Political and Government Relations Organizer
SEIU Oregon State Council