



To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

From: Audrey Gill

Date: 3/20/2025

RE: Support for SB 5526 POP 109 Personnel Safety

Dear Co-Chairs Valderrama and Hartman and members of the committee,

My name is Audrey Gill, and I work for ODHS in Child Protective Services (CPS). I have been with CPS Unit for 4 years, over-all 5 years with the agency. Prior to working for ODHS, I was worked with adjudicated youth in a residential treatment program as the coordinator of up to 18 youth at a time ranging from youth ages 11 – 19 years old who were involved with Child Welfare, Juvenile Department, Oregon Youth Authority, and Mental Health. I did this line of worker for 10 years

I am writing in support of *ODHS SB 5526 POP 109* and asking you to make additional investments that would improve office and worker safety. POP 109 would allocation funds for facilities improvements and security and outreach contracts. Data shows a 450% increase in threatening incidents at ODHS offices over the last five years.

ODHS workers serve 1 in 3 Oregonians all around the state, from birth to late retirement services, and meet households where they are. While ODHS has innovated to make services more accessible, many Oregonians continue to rely on office setting to access services. The agency is struggling to maintain adequate safe and secure working environments across its statewide operations.

While we try our best to deescalate situations, workers are often verbally threatened and or physical approached by the public. After an intense situation, workers are expected to return to serving clients.

I have some serious concerns about working with families who are actively using dangerous substances. With the rise of fentanyl addiction, CPS workers are more often in harm's way. We are exposed to danger as much as law enforcement when checking on children and should be paid some type of Hazard Pay or differential. For example, I and another co-worker went to check on a Safety Plan on a family when we began to experience itchy throats and headaches. We advised the parents that we

were stepping out to speak with our supervisor. We were only in the house for approx. 5 minutes.

While in the car we began feeling lightheaded, our eyes were dilated. I called for medical help due to my co-worker and myself not making sense when trying to speak with our supervisor. Medical Response transported both of us to the emergency room for further evaluation where my symptoms continued to get worse as I was further in the home then my co-worker. It was so bad I felt like clawing at my skin and wanting to pull my teeth out along with my heart racing, like it was pounding out of my chest. The worse part, besides there being a child who could not talk and express themselves of not feeling well from being in the home and us being exposed, the emergency room doctors could not tell us what we had been exposed too.

This is becoming more and more common of having to respond to homes that are consuming or manufacturing methylphenidate, fentanyl, heroin, and now horse tranquilizers being mixed into these substances makes it very hard to feel safe from not being exposed and possibly dying from whatever it is that is being inhaled and could die from. It is sad that I now have to carry Benadryl (allergy meds), masks and now Narcan.

Without the investment described in POP 109, office safety will persist as an issue and increase turnover and workplace complaints. Please write SB 5526 POP 109 into the budget to ensure that workers are safe on the job.

Thank you for your time,

Audrey Gill