



Wednesday, March 25, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Taylor, Vice chair Bonham and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Rev. Debra Mecartea and I work at the Oregon Health and Science University as a chaplain. I have worked at OHSU for 17 years in order to support patients, family and staff of any and no faith in practical, emotional and spiritual ways during some of the toughest days of their lives. I have worked at other hospitals, but OHSU, a Level I trauma and educational institution, offers outstanding medical care and has challenged and broadened my skills and compassion in ways no other place could.

SB 757 makes a technical change to the retirement of a small handful of OHSU chaplains. SB 128 from the 2023 session aligned prison chaplains who are tier 3 PERS recipients to treat and include their housing allowance as a member's taxable income with tier 1 and 2.

When I noticed this bill for other public chaplains, I was so excited because I thought maybe the OHSU chaplains could be included also. My work at OHSU is nearing completion as I am retiring soon. In the past 4 years I have had to choose between using my housing allowance as a tax deduction or forgoing that and having my full salary count towards my PERS retirement income. All the income I have earned over my 17 years has been counted minus my housing income for PERS (before I even knew it was counted against my retirement). This means I will make much less in retirement because I was using the housing allowance I was able to use. I ask that you pass this bill so that future generations won't miss out on retirement funds.

The work we perform is a critical service to Oregonians in need of spiritual services when navigating a tough time in their lives. We believe it is fair and just to be included in this technical fix and urge a yes vote for this small number of workers.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Debra Mecartea, M.Div, BCC
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