

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazan and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today in support of HB 3838 to establish a Workforce Standards Board in the Long-term Care Industry.

Given my actual experience in this field, I'll just be upfront and say that the expectations that people have of medical workers are fundamentally unfair and often dehumanizing. As a result, medical labor and professional caregiving (whether residential or clinical; I have experience with both, as is common) are hazardous, daunting traumatizing. I have never met another caregiver over the age of 25 that wasn't showing clear signs of PTSD, and physical injuries are outright normalized in most settings. Relationships between coworkers are often strained or defensively motivated, with bullying and sexual harassment being common. Sexual assault by patients is so normalized that many coworkers will find it strange if you react in the ways most people would after being fondled by a stranger, with no training on how to deescalate or redirect such behaviors from confused patients. Every time I've seen it brought up, the response from almost everyone, management and coworkers alike, was to laugh. Anyone with a history of sexual trauma is basically thrown to the wolves in this field.

The worst part of all of this is just how unresponsive and unhelpful the majority of management for Assisted Living, In-Home Care Agencies and Nursing Facilities are. Their most common response to any problem is to tell us to deal with it ourselves, unless our chosen solution is to organize. Whenever that kind of talk comes up, the usually docile, sleepy-eyed managers that we normally only see three days a week start firing on all cylinders ("firing" being a common method), setting up meetings and seminars and distributing literature to everyone talking about how "bad" it would be if we unionized a facility or company, with open and honest discussion between coworkers being outright impossible because of everyone fearing losing their jobs, given how insubstantial the current protections from such action currently is, requiring you to sue the company that wrongfully fired you, with legal fees only being paid for by the offending company after they've lost the case. A case that 99 times out of 100 won't happen, because medical laborers generally don't have thousands of dollars lying around to hire a lawyer, and management and executives know that.

This was a lot more of a rant than I initially intended, but it was all summarizing my lived experiences in this field. While I'm sadly not in a state physically or mentally to do the work anymore, I am proud of what I managed to accomplish in the years I worked in long term care. I met so many of the best and kindest people I know in this field, most of whom are still grinding away at it, hoping that things can someday get better. Many of us just run out of time to wait, though, with more than I like to remember either losing their lives due to exhaustion or taking them due to despair. This is the expectation of our current superiors, and they make that clear as day in every interaction we have with them; we're an expendable and easily replaced resource. We don't see ourselves that way, nor do our patients and their families, but where we see "people," the individuals that own the companies, write the policies and maintain the systems that we work under see "customers," "assets" and "liabilities." I hope it's clear just how fundamentally incompatible these worldviews are, and I hope that my ramblings have illustrated some of the problems of allowing one to take priority over the other in what is, regardless of corporate policy or legal mandate, a PEOPLE-oriented field, with its true foundations in love, respect and community,

I trust our current governor to understand that better than those in control right now, so

I urge you to support HB 3838 and stand with the workers who keep our care system running.

Sincerely,
Elijah Nelson
Beaverton, OR