

House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
April 28th, 2025

Chair Grayber and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards for Senate Bill 588. We would have loved to be present in person and continue to partake in this process but a previous commitment makes that impossible today.

My name is Karen Ellis, I live in Clackamas County in Senate District 20 and House District 39. I am married to Sean Ellis a former Law Enforcement officer. In 2020, Sean became unable to work due to debilitating PTSD sustained in the line of duty. It became clear in 2021 that Sean would not be able to return to duty and since then, we have been trying to obtain his PERS disability pension. I will not go over all of the details of our ordeal as Sean and I both gave testimony before the Senate Committee on Labor and Business on January 30th 2025. However, I would like to convey how urgent we feel it is for SB 588 to pass in 2025 for our family and countless others like ours that have been in limbo waiting for the PERS benefits that were promised in their compensation packages.

Police Officers and Firefighters have a very unique and specialized skill set. Their training is precise to the job at hand. There is not a plug and play transition for these men and women. Therefore, when a firefighter or police officer sustains a career ending injury it is particularly devastating to families like ours, especially for an occupational disease or injury that is invisible such as PTSD. PTSD robs them of their ability to concentrate, be consistent and reliable, their ability to be patient and view multiple perspectives. It robs them of simple joys . . . such as watching their kids sporting events because of diminished stress tolerance. PTSD rewires your brain and neural pathways it is not just a mental health “issue” but an actual physiological injury. PTSD impacts the entire family not just the individual afflicted. Sean has been deep in treatment for almost 5years. It is a grind. One he is willing to endure for our family, but often times feels like there is no end in sight. The added financial strain has only compounded how daunting it all is, as we wait year after year for Sean's PERS disability benefits.

SB 588 is of the utmost importance to us and families like ours. This bill will provide dignity and respect police officers and firefighters deserve for their service and sacrifice, allowing them to more promptly and efficiently access their benefits when they are irreparably harmed in performance of their duties. We strongly support of SB 588 and urge you to support it as well.

In closing, we are grateful for Senator Meek's attentiveness to our plea for help and his diligence in pursuing this bill. Thank you for the team effort in the Senate with Senator Meek, Chair Taylor, PERS, OSFFC, OSPOA, and other stakeholders.

Chair Grayber and committee members, Please support and pass SB 588 this 2025 session. Thank you for your time.

Thank you,

Karen and Sean Ellis