



OREGON STATE SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION
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PO Box 7468 Salem OR 97303

To: Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Sheriff Matt English, Hood River County Sheriff's Office
Oregon State Sheriffs' Association

Date: May 5, 2025

Re: **HB 3929 A – Testimony in Support
Peer Support Confidentiality**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Matt English. I am the Hood River County Sheriff, and I am here today on behalf of the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association in strong support of HB 3929 A.

I began my career in public safety over twenty-seven years ago. My very first call, on my very first day in uniform was to a tragic farm accident where a man was almost completely decapitated. Seeing this carnage, seeing the victim's wife and co-workers standing over his lifeless body despondent, was a lot for someone in their early twenties that had never experienced an event like this.

My experience was just a snippet of the trauma, stress and exposure to critical incidents that our public safety professionals endure in a career that is assumed to last twenty-five years or more.

When I started, you were expected to "suck it up" and "deal with it", there were no discussions about available services or checking in with those that had endured traumatic events because those things didn't exist in the manner they do today.

In recent years, there has been a long overdue pivot to focus on wellness. We are seeing a major shift in the public safety profession where the impacts of trauma, both acute and long term, are being recognized and addressed. This has required a cultural change coupled with the implementation of robust programs to support our first responders. There are some amazing things going on in our state regarding wellness in public safety.

Peer support programs are one example of where great strides in addressing mental health and wellness have been made. Peer Support Teams have become an essential component of our wellness strategies, providing officers and other public safety personnel with a trusted avenue to process their experiences, seek guidance, and maintain their mental

health. This is done using peers that are formally trained and culturally competent. A necessity in garnering meaningful use by our first responders.

This bill became necessary following the decision of a Washington State Court that compelled disclosure of what were believed to be, protected peer support conversations. The court's direction created significant concern within the law enforcement community, resulting in deep concern that public safety personnel may waver or refuse to seek the peer support they desperately need, fearing that their words may not remain private.

HB 3929 protects our law enforcement, firefighters, corrections personnel, emergency telecommunicators, and emergency medical services from having to disclose communications during legal proceedings that were made to a peer support provider.

In order to support this long overdue culture change, it is imperative that we support our personnel by protecting their confidentiality and promoting access to wellness programs that aim to ensure our first responders are healthy, seek to reduce PTSD and suicide rates and, target a fruitful retirement after a long and meaningful career of service to our respective communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.