



Mr. Chair members of the committee,

For the record my name is Ron Thompson and I am here today representing Oregon AFSCME. I work as a Facilities Energy Technician at the Snake River Correctional Facility in Ontario Oregon. I am here supporting HB 3245.

I want to first thank Representative Witt for getting this bill introduced at the request of Local 2376. HB 3245 was introduced to correct a problem that has emerged around the inmate work program.

As a way to reduce recidivism, the Department of Corrections worked with the Building Codes Division and DOC trade staff to create a series of inmate apprentice programs. The purpose is to give some inmates trade and license skills they can use to find a working, living wage job upon completion of their incarceration. Within in the large medium institutions inmates are accepted into apprenticeship programs. To complete an apprenticeship program the inmates must complete up to 4000 hours of classroom time and on the job training under supervision of qualified, licensed staff. Finishing an apprentice program gains the inmate licensure in the trade they apprentice under. For example an electrical apprentice can obtain a plant maintenance electrical license, which is close to having a journey license. The plant maintenance electrical license allows the holder of the license to do all journey work with the exception of residential housing, which the agency has no way to apprentice.

As in all good things – sometimes the silver lining gets tarnished. Many of the trained licensed inmates ultimately get transferred to some of the smaller minimum facilities, such as PRCF, SCCI, CRCI, SCI and WCCF. One problem is there are no licensed staff electricians at these facilities. As the agency has a responsibility to maintain the safety and security of each facility, inmates have been called upon to do work that should be completed by licensed staff. These licensed inmates are assigned a job and supervised by in most instances a correctional officer. In no instance do I know of or have I heard of a correctional officer holding a license equal or higher than the license the inmate holds while supervising mainly electrical work within our facilities. The DOC correctional officers are professional and highly trained to supervise in a correctional setting, but not necessarily qualified to supervise a trained licensed inmate working within the scope of the license he carries. This opens the door for intentional or unintentional mischief on the inmates' part while doing work that could affect the security and/or safety of an institution. A problem with the current statutes in Oregon allows that a person holding an

electrical license is not required to be supervised by a licensed individual. Unfortunately the DOC believes this definition crosses inside the facilities. Several attempts by this union and management to clarify and require the inmates be supervised by qualified maintenance staff holding a current license equal to or higher than the level of work the inmate is assigned to has resulted in a status quo.

As the maintenance employees of the DOC we are expected to protect the assets of the state and maintain the working environment of our prisons and the entire infrastructure. We cannot do our jobs if we are not aware of what inmates are doing, good, bad, right and wrong. We need to be able to instruct inmates when they make honest errors or mistakes and hold them accountable when mischief is their goal.

This bill if passed simply says that in addition to any security supervision inmate workers must be managed by a maintenance employee who has an equivalent license and knowledge of the work being done. It does not impair the ability of the DOC to do apprenticeship programs nor does it stop inmates from doing complicated and important work, it simply makes the system more secure and protects the states investments.

Thank you. I am happy to take questions.

**Ron Thompson
Oregon AFSCME, Local 2376**