



Service Employees International Union, Local 503, OPEU

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Randy Davis, Brant Johnson
Subject: Support for House Bill 2024
Date: February 14, 2013

Good afternoon Chair Barker and members of the committee. My name is Randy Davis and I am a direct care worker at the Oregon State Hospital (OSH). With me today is Brant Johnson, who is also a direct care worker at OSH. We are both members of SEIU Local 503.

As direct care workers at OSH we come to work everyday knowing that it is our job to provide the safest and most therapeutic environment possible for some of Oregon's most fragile citizens. We do this not because it is just a job, but because we care about the safety and well being of all the patients at OSH. We are here today to speak in favor of House Bill 2024.

The recent changes at OSH have been unprecedented in Oregon history. Thanks to the effort of the legislature and the people of Oregon we now have a new physical structure that is state of the art. Although the building is new, the inherent dangers of working with people who have a mental illness have not changed. When the new building was built there was some hope that the violence amongst patients and directed towards staff, would be greatly reduced or eliminated all together. Sadly this is not the case.

The truth is, there are a number of aggressive patients that continue to assault both staff and patients. Many of these patients are those who are criminally committed and have more behavioral health problems than severe mental illness. These are patients who knowingly and willingly will assault other patients and staff. They do this knowing that there is no criminal consequence for this behavior. These patients are usually on wards that are also home to patients with severe mental illnesses who are easily intimidated or cannot defend themselves against assaults.

Everyday, we the direct care workers at OSH, are there to help ensure the safest living environment possible. This unfortunately includes being the target of assaults by patients. The stories of these patient assaults are numerous and too many to list. From the staff who have had their nose broken twice in a year to the black eyes and bruises on arms and legs, these are just some of the examples of injuries sustained by direct care workers. The time required for staff to treat their injuries varies, but it almost always means that for some period of time, fewer staff are on the floor and able to treat and protect patients.

The patients that commit these types of assaults do so knowing that criminal prosecution will more than likely not happen. To add insult to injury, the patient that committed the assault remains on the unit where the assault happened.

We direct care workers at OSH willingly work with a variety of patients with various degrees and diagnoses of mental illness. But it is discouraging when we are unable to properly care for the majority of patients because of assaults by patients who see no consequences for their actions.

Please support this House Bill 2024 to protect us and to make the environment of OSH a safer place for patients and staff.

Thank you,
Randy Davis, Mental Health Therapist Oregon State Hospital

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