



From the Office of Sen. Floyd Prozanski

OHSU Supports Senate Bill 565

OHSU supports Senate Bill 565 as part of our ongoing efforts to provide the highest level of safety for OHSU patients, visitors and staff. This bill would provide statutory authority to arm its fully commissioned and trained police officers. This bill is modeled after the Oregon University System legislation that passed in 2011. The ultimate decision as to whether OHSU will arm its police officers will be made by the OHSU Board of Directors, with opportunity for community input prior to a final decision.

Background

In 2008, OHSU organized a public task force to evaluate our critical incident readiness in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings. The task force, chaired by Senator Ginny Burdick, recommended that OHSU strengthen its public safety officer training and establish an armed law enforcement presence by: 1) contracting with a local police department or 2) employing its own armed law enforcement officers.

At the time, OHSU chose the first of those options – contracting with an existing police force. In 2009, OHSU received statutory authority that allowed for OHSU's public safety officers to transition into a true police department, a change that allowed for additional training of OHSU officers at the state police academy (DPSST).

Current Issue

After extensive evaluation, OHSU concluded that contracting with an outside police force was an unworkable option for a variety of reasons: 1) training levels for outside officers would be insufficient for OHSU's unique population and unique needs; 2) OHSU would be unable to appropriately supervise/manage the outside force; 3) OHSU would be unable to control which officers were assigned to the university and what service level would be provided.

Supporting this bill is not something the institution takes lightly. We believe the OHSU community requires a very different standard of firearm proficiency and policing than the average community. In addition to our tactically difficult environment due to high-occupancy structures, the community is also often inhabited by individuals under extreme psychological stress. This can be due to mental health issues, end-of-life scenarios or other problems associated with what can be a once-in-a-lifetime trip to a hospital complex. OHSU is committed to providing its officers with training significantly above the state standards in both firearm proficiency and the communication skills necessary to avoid using force in any situation. Our officers will be experts in mental health, communication, de-escalation and crisis management.

Please support Senate Bill 565. Thank you.

For more information, please contact Suzy Funkhouser (cell: 503-701-6212) or Julie Hanna (cell: 503-860-2662) of OHSU Government Relations.