



Service Employees International Union, Local 503, OPEU

**Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee
In Support of House Bill 4036
Arthur Towers, Political Director, SEIU Local 503
February 10, 2014**

SEIU Local 503 represents the vast majority of workers at the Oregon State Hospital. Among these hundreds of workers are Mental Health Technicians and many other front-line workers striving to provide high-quality care to Oregonians with severe mental illness. We support HB 4036.

We have spent the last decade seeking to improve the quality of treatment at the state hospital. We have met repeatedly with management to improve staffing levels, reduce mandatory overtime, improve training, improve retention, and decrease the amount of time it takes to get newly-recruited staff into the hospital.

We have fought to get management to follow its own rules regarding safer staff deployment. We have wholeheartedly supported efforts to make treatment more humane and effective, to reduce the use of seclusion and restraint, and to make the hospital safer for patients and care providers.

We have come to the capitol to educate legislators on these issues, and to expose unhealthy and dangerous conditions that reduce the quality of care. We have lobbied the health care committees, the ways and means process, and leadership. We have gone to the press and also purchased paid advertising to publicize the issue of sub-standard care. We provided input into the design of the new hospital in Salem only to see cost-cutting measures create design flaws that erode patient and worker safety,

We have been involved in negotiating sessions at the bargaining table into the wee hours of the morning fighting to use the collective bargaining process to make the hospital a better place for workers and patients.

We have leveraged the power of our 55,000-member union to try to make the state hospital an effective treatment option for the severely mentally ill, and to make the facility safer for patients and workers alike.

Yet, despite improvements -- in the face of false starts and setbacks and hopes and false hopes -- the violence continues.

In that context, we come forward in support of this legislation. Front-line workers testifying today can provide better insight than I can about the violence impacting patients and workers, violence that interferes with treatment for the large number of patients not perpetrating the attacks.

But I can say that, as a state, we have to do better for the vulnerable mentally ill under attack in our state hospital, and we have to do better for those who care for them. I urge your support for House Bill 4036.

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