



Testimony in Support of House Bill 2213

April 6, 2015

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Workforce Committee:

My name is Nick Koval and I am the Executive Vice President for the Association of Oregon Corrections Employees (AOCE) representing all Corrections Professionals in our Labor Organization. Corrections Professionals are staff members who are not Corrections Officers that are DPSST Certified.

I would like to discuss HB 2213. Since the original law was passed, making safety a mandatory subject of bargaining, it has only applied to strike-prohibited employees. While the law was needed and necessary, it left a group of individuals unprotected: the DOC's Corrections Professionals. These individuals may work right alongside the Correction Officers, or they may take and supervise an inmate crew without the assistance of a Corrections Officer. In a declared emergency, Correction Professionals can and have been directed to perform many duties of a Corrections Officer.

Every person who works inside a correctional institution is at risk of personal harm each and every time we enter the institution. Corrections Professionals get attacked by inmates just like Corrections Officers - some very severely.

We are also witness to many fights and attacks by inmates and may possibly be the first responder due to our location and availability of an officer.

I have been in my position with the AOCE off and on almost 10 years. In that time, I have dealt with Nurses and Food Service Coordinators being attacked. Just before I was hired a Physical Plant worker had been brutally beaten by an inmate.

In my time with the DOC I have had three incidents that could have turned very ugly. I had no Corrections Officer in the immediate area to assist, nor was I trained to respond to the incident other than the use of a radio. I had to rely on my past experience to control the situation. Someone else may have not been so lucky.

Nurses also deal with many threats daily. They deal with scalpels and needles. We had one nurse who was so brutally attacked by an inmate she ended up leaving DOC. Food Service Coordinators hand Inmates 12 inch knives. Physical Plant Workers hand the inmates countless numbers of tools for their daily tasks. Physical Plant Workers also take inmates into mechanical tunnels alone with no one else to assist in the supervision of work for hours on a regular basis.

Hopefully, I am painting a picture that we who are not DPSST certified take a risk - and sometimes a bigger risk - than the Corrections Officer does on a daily basis. I ask you, what Officer in his right mind would hand a convicted felon in a maximum-security prison a 12-inch knife?

Also keep in mind the DOC does not have a Safety Manager or Safety department anymore. This was cut with budget cuts years ago. This only compounds our problem.

In order for a Corrections Professional to get the DOC to take our safety concerns seriously, we must attach a Corrections Officer to the complaint. Sometimes we have to be very creative before the DOC will sit down at the table to discuss a solution.

We have OR-OSHA, Building Codes and the EPA at our disposal any time but there are issues that arise that do not fit into those scenarios. This is why we need to expand the law to include all personnel working with or around inmates.

Hopefully you can see why the Corrections Professionals need an outlet so we also can be heard – for the safety and well being of all staff working inside the institutions and anywhere around inmates.

Please keep in mind when the original law was enacted, the cost was minimal if anything to the State. We now need to be able to get all parties to the table to find a safe and satisfactory conclusion to this issue.

Please support House Bill 2213.

Thank you,

Nick Koval
Executive Vice President Corrections Professionals
Association of Oregon Corrections Employees