

Dear Co-chairs Bates and Nathanson and members of the committee,

Thank you for hearing HB 2816A and giving the opportunity to testify on the bill. My name is Eva Rippeteau. I am a political coordinator at AFSCME Council 75.

Since you have heard from Ken Allen and Randy Ridderbusch on why AFSCME is asking that the employees of the Stabilization and Crisis Unit be given P&F PERS, I would like to focus on what the bill does and provide some information on the –A2 amendments.

- The bill has been written to be prospective. Employees only begin to earn P&F credit from the bill's effective date. This means those who choose to retire immediately will not receive any "extra" PERS benefits, making little impact on the 15-17 budget.
- The Police and Fire classification of PERS is called that because they were the first to receive this benefit but has since been expanded to include other job titles. This is the only way to offer employees the ability for early retirement with slightly enhanced final formula benefits.

This leads to why we believe Stabilization and Crisis Unit employees should be allowed P&F PERS and the reason for the –A2 amendments:

This bill is not an attempt to reclassify the work of the employees of the Stabilization and Crisis Unit as guards or police, they provide behavior supports and are responsible for the health and safety of the clients. In 1994, the Oregon Court of Appeals deemed the work of the state-operated group homes as the equivalent to "guards at a mental hospital" and as a result of that, prohibited the employees from being able to strike, just like other job classifications who receive the P&F PERS. While calling SACU employees "guards" is certainly an outdated term for the work done, they are responsible for the health and safety of the clients in their care. As you have heard, this care can be physically and emotionally demanding, and sometimes lead to injuries that need medical attention and counseling. As we all know, as we age, it becomes more difficult to recover from injuries, even smaller ones. It is for these reasons, we believe the Stabilization and Crisis Unit employees are eligible for P&F PERS benefits.

During the hearings for HB 2618, advocates expressed concerns over the language used to define the work of the SACU employees. The language describing the duties as "maintaining the safety, behavior and control of residents" was hurtful to the DD community, and it is important to fix it. The –A2 amendments were drafted to remove references to controlling behavior and to make clear that we are not trying to reclassify the work SACU does. We worked with Sen Gelser to craft language that would define the employees in a clear manner but not be hurtful. I believe those amendments are posted to OLIS.

Thank you again for the time and consideration. Please adopt the –A2 amendments and pass HB 2618.