



March 6, 2016

Chair Kathleen Taylor
Senate Committee on Workforce
900 Court St. - State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Taylor and members of the Committee:

My name is Brant Johnson. I am a member of SEIU and I currently work as a Crisis Intervention coach at the Oregon State Hospital. I am here today in support of SB 811 and to tell you about the work that I do and why I believe State Hospital workers should be included in the high-risk, high-stress category of PERS.

I have worked at the hospital for ten years, most of that time as a mental health therapist in the most secure portions of the hospital.

The high-risk, high-stress designation of PERS started as a designation for Police and Fire and over the years the legislature has chosen to add other professions. This was done in the recognition that there are some jobs that are inherently dangerous. There are some jobs that leave workers with a shorter life span. This designation is intended for physically rigorous and dangerous occupations.

This designation allows workers to retire at an earlier age and to have a slightly higher benefit factor used in calculating their retirement benefits.

During my time at the state hospital, I, like most of my colleagues, have sustained numerous injuries and now carry the physical and emotional scars with me. My left shoulder, my left hand, and my knees hurt pretty much every day. And although I used to love to go to concerts, go see a play, or go to festivals these days my PTSD makes it difficult to be around too many strangers. And I wouldn't wish it away. I love my job. It is so rewarding to know that I have been able to serve and assist some of Oregon's most vulnerable and at times forgotten citizens.

In my role as a union leader at the State Hospital we have worked with the administration to improve the hospital, making it a safer place to work for the employees, and a better place for patients to live. It IS better than it was and it continues to improve, however it will never be a completely safe or stress free environment to work in. Forensic mental health will always be stressful and potentially dangerous work. It takes a

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special kind of person to face scary situations, physical assault, and emotional pain and come back the next day with positive enthusiasm to serve those same patients. The patients of Oregon State Hospital deserve the best staff we can put there and those staff deserve to be recognized for their sacrifice and service to our community.

PERS was designed for a worker to work 30 years and then retire. 30 years in forensic mental health is too long to be at the top of your game. There is truly no place to work in the State Hospital where you are ever truly safe or free from having to think about your safety. The Hospital is built with normalizing the patient's experience in mind. This is good and necessary for the patients and it also means that even if you work in an office support role and patient care isn't part of your job you will still buy your lunch at the cafeteria where a patient will be eating, you will walk through the treatment mall hallway filled with patients, you will park your car and walk into work past a patient grounds crew, and you will buy your morning latte from a patient working as a barista. All of that is what makes for excellent patient care and is also why each and every person that works at Oregon State Hospital must always consider their surroundings, make sure doors shut behind them, think about if they can move quickly with the shoes they choose to wear, and make sure they don't lose their pen just to name a few things and are never truly safe from a possible crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.