



June 12, 2017

Co-Chair Jackie Winters
Co-Chair Duane Stark
Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety
900 Court St. - State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chair Winters, Co-Chair Stark, and members of the committee:

My name is Mike Scott. I have been with the Oregon Department of Transportation for 22 years. I work highway maintenance out of Grants Pass in Southern Oregon. I also serve as the Statewide President of SEIU ODOT Local 730. I represent approximately 1900 ODOT workers from motor carrier, central services, and highway maintenance. I am here today to testify in support of HB 2721.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you to the sponsors of this bill for the opportunity to talk about this important issue. In a moment, you will get to hear from James and his personal experience with being assaulted while performing his job. But I wanted to give you a sense of why we wanted to bring this legislation forward.

Increasingly, it seems that ODOT workers are being faced with a more hostile and aggressive general public. Most of these incidences occur when we are holding traffic or working adjacent to private property. As for myself, I apply herbicide to the right of way. Over the years I have been threatened with death, bodily harm, and have had weapons drawn on me.

Just as recent as last month, an ODOT crew was working a chip seal operation near Dufur on Hwy 97. The operation took a little longer than expected partially due to heat changing the nature of the materials, and partially a change in the operation around a bridge in the area. A water truck was used to cool the materials down. This stretched the wait time in the queue to about 30 minutes. A motorist became aggravated, stating that he was concerned about groceries in his car and about kids coming from school without a parent home. He became agitated with the wait and threatened to shoot a contract flagger, an ODOT TMC, and a pilot car operator if they did not let him through. As we all know, that is nothing to take lightly these days, and the ODOT worker notified Oregon State Patrol immediately. The actions of the offender were verified by eyewitnesses in the traffic queue and OSP charged the driver with

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
LOCAL 503

PO Box 12159
Salem, OR 97309-1259

1730 Commercial St. SE
Salem, OR 97302

6401 SE Foster Rd.
Portland, OR 97206

1.800.452.2146
www.seiu503.org

menacing. The contractor and the employees did their best to calm the situation and did a good job of not allowing the situation to escalate.

In my role as President of our local, I continue to hear from workers around the state about the increasingly confrontational behavior they encounter from the traveling public. Some of our workers are more skilled than others in de-escalating situations and many times, folk are able to walk away without the situation rising to the level of assault. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

HB 2721 would increase penalties for assault committed against a highway worker, similar to that of an emergency medical provider, taxi driver or public transit operator. HB 2721 also creates a task force on road worker safety. This is an important component of the bill so we can figure out what some of the preventative things are that we can be doing to keep workers safe before it escalates to assault.

My understanding is that an amendment is being proposed that would remove the task force. While I understand the goal of removing the amendment, we would prefer to see the bill pass as it was originally drafted.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.