



# OREGON AFSCME

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## OREGON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY INTERIM HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

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### **Re: Public testimony related to COVID – Person Protective Equipment, Safety and the Department of Corrections.**

Madam Chair, Co-Chairs and honorable members of the committee,

My name is Tim Woolery; I work for Oregon AFSCME Council 75 as a Staff Representative. It is my pleasure to provide video verbal testimony before you today on the following questions:

1. Do you have the PPE you need?
2. When/If you have expressed concerns - have they been addressed to employee's satisfaction or are they ongoing issues?
3. Do you feel safe in the workplace?
4. Do you feel safe in the community?

Additionally, I thought to additionally provide this written testimony in advance to save your time and focus on the questions posed. In terms of background, I have been working for Council 75 for almost 15 years as the Lead Corrections Coordinator and Staff Representative. Prior to that, I was also honored to previously be employed with the Oregon Department of Corrections as a Correctional Officer for approximately 18 years. My current job, along with the help of four of my peers, is directly involved in facilitating and advocating for the advancement of the interests of the majority of represented employees in the Oregon Department of Corrections. Among our other public safety units, Oregon AFSCME Council 75 is the exclusive representative for approximately 1,900 employees in the AFSCME Security bargaining unit and about 1,350 employees in various other classifications in our AFSCME Security Plus bargaining unit both of which are employed by the Oregon Department of Corrections. The represented employees of these units work in essential and critical jobs to keep the citizens of Oregon safe by providing services and security supervision for almost 15,000 convicted felons in facilities spread throughout the state.

Part of my role is in helping to negotiate and enforce the contract between those public employees and the State of Oregon. Frequent communications with the elected leaders as well as the more than 3,000 represented employees – who directly perform the vital and essential services of that agency – provide me with a good perspective on the diversified work that they perform as well as the concerns and grievances that they occasionally have.

Oregon AFSCME has a good collaborative long term relationship together with the Department of Corrections Director Colette Peters and her administration. This has become even more critical during this COVID-19 epidemic that we all are dealing with. More now than ever we appreciate and encourage frequent communications to and from Ms. Peters, Ms. Steward and other DOC Executives with us and our elected leaders and represented employees. Communications are vital as we address issues and make necessary corrections to maintain safe operations during this crisis. I wanted to also highlight the selfless dedication, professionalism and amazing work being performed by the employees in all classifications within this Agency. The represented public safety employees in ODOC are nothing short of heroic for many things not the least of which during normal circumstances is their fortitude and resolve to come to work each day one of the most potentially violent and negative environments imaginable. It takes a moment to fully consider the ramifications of their chosen professions prior to the current pandemic and even more so now.

Some of you may have already toured one or more ODOC facilities and have seen firsthand some of the challenges facing these employees who faithfully perform the vital services that keep the rest of society safe 24 hours / 365 days a year. If you have not yet had the opportunity, I encourage you to do so once this pandemic has subsided. Under normal circumstances this environment takes a tremendous toll on the employees and their families with extremely high levels of PTSD, other stress related illnesses and medical conditions with things such as hypervigilance or mandatory overtime contributing to a lack of adequate sleep. AFSCME has been a strong advocate and partner with the Agency and our sister Labor Organization the AOCE in supporting these essential employees. Recently that includes advocating for and ensuring they have proper Personal Protective Equipment to perform the assigned work as well as developing and revising procedures to have as safe of working conditions that are possible in their challenging environment.

In these stationary cruise ships that are a good analogy to the confined cities that facilities equate to – Adults In Custody and staff have significant challenges maintaining 6 or more feet of good social distancing. As of May 26<sup>th</sup> there has been forty-three (43) employees and one hundred and fifty four (154) AICs that have had positive COVID-19 test results. As you can imagine, years and years of increased numbers of AICs placed into emergency beds that over time become considered regular housing nevertheless result in facilities that have been crammed in beyond institutional design capacities. This is despite a lack of increased staffing or what we feel appropriate staffing levels should be to ensure the safety of employees and inmates alike are not potentially put into jeopardy without consideration of the current pandemic. The Oregon Department of Corrections and its employees are trying to manage as best they can with the resources, they have been given to keep everyone safe and secure. The budgetary projections and reductions being contemplated simply cannot safely be accomplished. Any help that the Oregon Legislature, Governor's Office and our representatives back in Washington DOC can provide to restore r maintain funding levels is much appreciated. As this pandemic continues it course and hopefully soon subsides – the essential employees in Public Safety as well as all the other essential workers both public and private that have kept our society moving forward need your continued support.

Respectfully submitted on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

*Tim Woolery*

Tim Woolery  
Staff Representative – Lead Corrections Coordinator  
Oregon AFSCME Council 75