

Testimony in support of HB 3338 for the House Judiciary Committee
March 21, 2019

I am here today to speak in support of HB3338.

I have been a faculty member at PSU for eight years and for the past 16 years I have worked with folks experiencing homelessness in Portland. As a faculty member at Portland State University's School of Social Work I have witnessed the arming of our campus safety officers (CPSO) in 2014 which was approved against the wishes of the student, faculty and staff community. Fast forward to 2019 and a majority of students and faculty continue to call for disarming campus safety.

In 2014 the move to arm campus safety began with a narrative that focused on a need to investigate sexual assault experienced by students on campus. As we know, having armed police is not a prerequisite to investigating sexual assault. What we do know is this: A small minority of sexual assaults are committed by strangers (The White House Council on Women and Girls, 2014). Most sexual assault is perpetrated by acquaintances, and rarely does it happen in public places that are patrolled by armed officers. We understand the need for sworn officers to conduct sexual assault investigations but dispute that guns are needed to carry out this work. Police departments across the country have a track record of disrespectful responses to victims of sexual assault and failure to follow up when charges have been filed (Perez-Pena & Bogdanich, 2014).

In 2019 a new narrative is developing which is being used as justification for remaining armed. People experiencing homelessness who are on campus, which is considered public space, are being seen as a problem that must be managed by CPSO. The February 2019 report constructed by the Margolis Healy consulting firm contained numerous comments about homelessness pertaining to personal safety concerns. A number of respondents also noted concerns about interactions between armed police officers and individuals experiencing homelessness. One quote described a former student having CPSO called on him and his ID card taken away "because he looked homeless" (p. 127). Another respondent expressed concerns about people experiencing homelessness on campus but stated, "An armed officer wouldn't improve interactions... I feel safe because of community around me but not because of CPSO with arms (p. 122)." The words of a final respondent, and the only ones explicitly credited to a person with lived experience, are particularly powerful: "I experienced homelessness and, honestly, that was my low point. But coming to campus didn't feel like this was my safe space... Arming doesn't match the needs around safety (p. 144)." The report referenced can be found on [PSU's website](#).

As an institution of higher education we did not engage in any collective inquiry about 'what is needed to feel and be safe on campus?' amongst the campus community. Rather, we moved to arming CPSO against the wishes of the student body, faculty and staff and we remain armed to this day. I think we can all agree that we need to address safety on our campus but working towards the collective safety of our campus community does not need to be managed by officers with weapons.

Thank you, Representative Hernandez, for filing HB 3338.

Sincerely,
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