

February 28, 2023

Representative Dacia Grayber
House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for HB 2296

Chair Grayber and Members of the Committee:

TriMet is Oregon's largest transit provider, serving more than 1.6 million people across our 533-square mile service territory. We write today to express our support for HB 2296, which would allow retired PERS members to be rehired by public employers without a resulting reduction in their pension benefits.

The converging crises of behavioral health, addiction, and homelessness that we are seeing across Oregon are also manifesting themselves on our state's transit systems. In recent years, TriMet has seen a marked increase in problematic behavior on our system that includes violent confrontations, harassment, vandalism and open drug use on our buses and trains. The safety of our riders and operators is of paramount importance to TriMet, and it is also vitally important that people *feel* safe using our system. The people who depend on transit to get where they need to go deserve to feel comfortable and protected when they use our system, as do the people who make their living driving our buses and trains.

TriMet's approach to safety and security is led by unarmed personnel trained in de-escalation, including staff who focus on identifying riders in crisis and connecting them with addiction, counseling and housing resources. We have doubled our safety and security budget since fiscal year 2020 and significantly increased the size of our safety and security teams over the last several years. However, for the protection of our people, TriMet's policy is that personnel should call law enforcement to handle dangerous situations and avoid physical confrontations with individuals on our system unless it's a matter of life or death. When it comes to these kinds of violent interactions, there is no substitute for police involvement.

TriMet does not operate its own police force. The Multnomah County Sheriff Office manages our Transit Police Division, which is funded by TriMet but staffed by officers from law enforcement agencies across the region that we serve. Despite being budgeted for 65 officers, our Transit Police Division currently has only 20 officers on staff due to the acute workforce shortage being experienced by law enforcement agencies in the Portland region. Even when our Transit Police Division is fully staffed, TriMet still depends on local law enforcement to respond to serious incidents on our system. The current officer shortage is also impacting the ability of those local agencies to address the safety and security challenges we are seeing on transit.

The law enforcement agencies that TriMet partners with have shared that one the primary causes of the current public safety workforce crisis is mass retirements. In passing SB 1049 (2019), the Oregon Legislature allowed PERS employers to hire back PERS retirees including law enforcement officers

without an hour restriction, and this has been a vital tool for public safety agencies to maintain adequate service levels in the midst of the current workforce shortage. HB 2296 would simply extend the sunset on SB 1049, allowing PERS employers to continue hiring pack PERS employees for critical positions including public safety.

TriMet urges the committee to support HB 2296 to help address the safety of the riders who depend on our transit system and the operators who make our system work. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Myles Pengilly', written over a light-colored rectangular background.

Myles Pengilly
State Government Affairs Manager
TriMet