



03/21/2023

Good morning Co-chairs Valderrama, Campos and members of the Joint Subcommittee On Human Services,

For the record, my name is Matthew Freeman and I am a Mental Health Registered Nurse at the Oregon State Hospital. I have worked for the Oregon State Hospital for 6 years and am a proud member of AFSCME. I currently live in the State of Washington, however I commute to Salem, Oregon each week. It is well known that there is a national shortage of nurses throughout this country, but this is especially true in the field of mental health. It's hard to obtain and retain nurses in this area as it can be challenging and dangerous. However, this population needs our help. I truly feel that this population is underserved and that I am doing my part to give back to the community by caring for them. I support HB 5525 which appropriates monies to the State Hospital and support safe and secure staffing but I want to share a bit about the working conditions we find ourselves in.

The day to day at the Oregon State Hospital can be unpredictable and change in a heartbeat. When emergencies occur, we must count on our staffing numbers to keep the patients and our staff safe. When staffing numbers are low it's scary and stressful. I believe that having the LOA differential has encouraged staff to show up to work and even sign up for overtime. Since I started working here, staffing has always been difficult at the hospital, but the pandemic made it worse, much worse. I was never mandated until we hit the pandemic.

As you can imagine, being forced to stay an extra shift, under these stressful situations can be hard on the body. Not only is this harmful to our health, but it also effects our lives outside of work and the quality of care the patients receive. It really does help when we have regular staff on the unit, that also creates less stress for the patients as they have staff they trust and have rapport with. We also need staff with experience to ensure that proper care is given.

The reality is that regular staff should continue to receive this differential, at least until bargaining ends in June. This hospital hires agency nurses, which are paid more than the regular staff. Regular staff who show up to work should be shown appreciation, instead they are tempted to leave and work as agency nurses in order to make more money. Our hospital cannot afford to lose more nurses to agencies and most importantly our patients. We are consistantly getting recruited to join a travel nurse agency because pay is better but many of us stay despite the pay gap between travel nurses and state nurses. Not only do I ask that you help advocate for the differentials but also ask that you help find a long term solution for the staffing crisis. I support HB 5525 but would also like to see a long term solution to aliviate us who have stuck through the pandemic and continue to show up.

Thank you for your time,

Matthew Freeman