

Submitter: Anna Kraemer
Committee: House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Measure: HB2701
Re: Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 2701, **AND** Offer of Amendment

I am a current employee of the Oregon State Hospital and a former employee of a public Fire and EMS agency. I am testifying here in no official capacity. The opinions expressed here are my own and are not representative of any organization agencies I am associated with.

I submit this letter of testimony in support of HB2701 and offer amendment to include Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics in the applicable text.

As an employee at OSH I am not in direct contact with dangerous persons, however, as a member of the legal team I represent the hospital in hearings where I must recount the assaults and aggressions against those personnel. The testimony of those individuals ranges from verbal assaults and intimidation to fractured bones and the need for emergency medical treatment. These personnel are at risk daily and unpredictably and face those challenges every day when walking into the hospital. The stress and danger of providing care to those most affected by mental illness results in low recruitment and retention and ever-decreasing state employee morale. Providing an opportunity for healthier retirement for these front-line personnel shows respect for these positions and is a benefit which is well-deserved.

In support of Amendment to HB2701, I served a public Fire and EMS agency for 19 years in administration of personnel and human resources. EMTs and Paramedics are often first on scene to the same horrific scenarios faced by police and firefighters, yet they are not afforded the same pension benefits. The medical personnel perform life-saving actions. They tend to violent wounds such as gunshots and stabbings, they arrive to severely disfigured bodies in motor vehicle accidents, burn victims, console grieving families. Often medical personnel are injured by combative patients. They must continually, averaging more than 20 responses per day, make decisions that will directly result in the life or death of human beings. Despite the direct stressful and constant contact these dedicated individuals have with the public, they are not included in the language supporting their futures.

Picture a horrific motor vehicle accident involving trapped victims and a vehicle on fire. Firefighters and paramedics arrive in tandem. Police arrive and block the road for safety of personnel and render aid where appropriate. Firefighters douse the flames and cut the victims loose, turning over patient care to the EMTs and paramedics on scene who now take over patient care. Those medical personnel address broken bones, profuse bleeding, severe burns, medical histories and drug interactions in an attempt to stabilize the patient. That paramedic must keep the patient alive against all odds, often alone, in the back of the ambulance for however long it takes to reach the hospital knowing that their decisions will save or end a life.

Those firefighters and police likely remain at the scene performing their closing duties; however the imminent danger now rests on the paramedic. The paramedic who arrived at the same time as fire and police, to the same scene, and the same danger, but now must endure the heightened stress and responsibility for much longer and with greater consequence. This paramedic not only makes menial

wages compared to firefighters or police - Oregon average starting wage for EMT is \$14, Paramedic at \$17 vs. Police at \$30, or a Firefighter at \$24 - but is also expected to do so without the same consideration for the stress and danger of their position and a lessened concern for the stability of their future upon retirement.

Emergency medical responders are integral to the emergency services in every community and should be benefitted and supported in the same fashion as police, firefighters, and telecommunicators.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my testimony on this bill and I urge your support of HB2701. It is time that these positions facing daily threat of danger and acute stress be benefitted commensurate with their peers in public service.