



Chair Grayber, Vice-chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans,

My name is Margrett A. Simpkins, and I work as a Mental Health Registered Nurse at the Oregon State Hospital. I have worked here for 7 years. I began my nursing career at OSH straight out of nursing school. I specifically chose this facility because I wanted to serve a very neglected population and truly wanted to help patients succeed. Over the course of these seven years, I have come to realize just how important working here has become. The patients that enter our hospital are sicker, more violent and have no access to any mental health care in the community. This has been an incredibly difficult time, especially with the current staffing crisis. It is not just a matter of having more staff but one of safety, for both the patient population and staff. I am writing in support for HB 2701 with the -3 amendment.

I work on Bridges 1. This is a transition unit that prepares patients for discharge back into their communities. During my shift on my unit, I oversee medication administration, transportation of patients to work, treatment mall, clinic appts, meals, etc. I also engage with patients in conversation, perform assessments and make sure that the milieu is safe and calm. This is difficult to do when I, and my staff, deal with significantly emotionally unstable patients who can and do wreak havoc in the milieu. I am also required to attend/send staff to the multiple code greens which entails bringing in more individuals to respond to an immediate behavioral emergency that are called throughout the day. The recent Covid-19 Pandemic did not help. Having to wear a mask, PPE and enforcing quarantine isolation has made an already difficult and dangerous job worse as the patient's response to pandemic has been unpredictable and violent at times.

When I began my career at the hospital, I truly believed that what I did mattered. However, as the acuity of the patients at OSH increased; the multiple staff injuries that I witnessed and the sense from management that I was just a number, burn out began to creep up on me until I no longer had any empathy left for anyone, including myself. For years I have been running this way and my mental health has suffered because of it. The night before my first shift of the week I am anxious. Will today be the day that I am hit? If I am hit, how bad will it be? If it's not me, will it be my team, my friends? This has created a burden for my friends and loved ones as they don't know how to help or what to say. This bill is crucial so that workers like me can have a plan for retirement in the next 10 years. It will compensate for myself and other staff for the dangerous work that we do. Nurses at OSH are exposed to physically and mentally dangerous situations daily. Our jobs are just as dangerous as corrections officers, police officers, and firemen and should be treated as such. HB 2701 with the -3 amendment would create a new "high risk/high stress" category in PERS for OSH employees and 911 operators. Thank you for allowing me to testify on this bill and I hope you vote yes on HB 2701.

MARGRETT A. SIMPKINS, MSN RN