



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

My name is Zubin Rastegar RN, BSN, and I work as a Mental Health RN at Oregon State Hospital in Salem. I've worked here for 9.5 years and choose this career to help people recover, rebuild their lives and reintegrate themselves back into society safely. I am writing in support for HB 2701 with the -3 amendment. Our work at Oregon State Hospital is an essential part of our healthcare and correctional system mix into one. The work we do is emotionally and physically demanding, and it can take a toll on our well-being over time. As such, OSH employees who come in contact with patients deserve early retirement to protect their physical and mental health and reward us for our years of service.

Mental health professionals face numerous challenges in our work, including long hours, exposure to stress and trauma, and high levels of emotional exhaustion. These challenges can have long-term effects on their physical and mental health, leading to burnout, compassion fatigue, and other serious health issues. We work with patients who come from correctional facilities throughout Oregon, where we are exposed to violence and aggression from sometimes unmedicated patients. We may work with individuals who have a history of violence, and we must be prepared to manage dangerous situations all on our own. This puts us at risk of physical harm, and over time, it can lead to chronic health conditions, including high blood pressure, heart disease, and musculoskeletal disorders. It can be emotionally taxing, and mental health professionals may be exposed to situations where they feel helpless or powerless. This can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and self-doubt, which can affect their confidence and motivation over time.

In addition to the physical and emotional demands of their work, mental health professionals like us are also exposed to trauma and stress on a regular basis. We may work with patients who have experienced traumatic events, including abuse, violence, and other distressing situations. Over time, this can lead to vicarious trauma, also known as secondary trauma. This is the emotional stress that can result from hearing about the traumatic experiences of others. It can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other serious mental health issues.

Early retirement would provide mental health professionals with the opportunity to focus on our mental and emotional well-being and avoid the long-term psychological effects of vicarious trauma. We would have the time and resources to seek support and treatment if needed, and we would be able to retire in good health, rather than waiting until we are too exhausted or burned out to continue working. It would allow us to focus on their personal lives and relationships, which can help them maintain a positive outlook and sense of purpose. It would



also provide us with the financial security and independence they need to live comfortably in retirement and pursue our goals and dreams.

HB 2701 with the -3 amendment would create a new “high risk/high stress” category in PERS for OSH employees and 911 operators, allowing us to retire earlier with full benefits, as well as receive an increase in their final average salary. Thank you for allowing me to testify on this bill and I hope you vote yes on HB 2701.

Zubin Rastegar RN, BSN