

To: House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

From: Lisa Heicksen

Date: March 30, 2023

RE: Testimony in support of HB 2701 High Risk, High Stress

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Thuy, and members of the committee,

My name is Lisa Heicksen. I have worked at Oregon State Hospital for 33 years. My career at the hospital began in March of 1990 when I got hired on the Child and Adolescent Unit until it shut down in 2005. I then went to work on 48B an all-male GEI unit. I currently work on Anchor 1 which is a 370 admission / stabilization unit. At Oregon State Hospital, we admit some of the most violent, aggressive patients in the state, and work with them daily to try and stabilize them and get them ready for court.

Through my years of working at the hospital, I have seen some gruesome patient attacks on staff and have been in a few myself. I have seen staff get choked out, punched, kicked, slapped, liquids sprayed in eyes and face, feces and urine thrown on them, scalding hot liquids thrown on faces and bodies, spit on, bit, hair pulls, patients dragging staff into their room and have seen a patient come up behind a staff that was sitting on a constant and grab staff's head and slam it into the wall several times. There have been staff who have committed suicide due to the stress and intense, violence that we are exposed to daily. It is also traumatizing to the patients that have built a rapport with those staff and affects them by bringing up trauma from their past. Watching friends and co-workers get injured by violent patients and being taken out by ambulance is traumatizing and is not often understood by those who do not work in these conditions.

Staff have received many different injuries. Staff have had broken bones, broken noses, broken fingers, broken arms, broken legs, facial fractures, choked to unconsciousness, concussions, memory loss, broken ribs, cuts, gashes, TBI-traumatic brain injuries, hair being pulled out and has been pulled away from the scalp, damage to eyes and ears and burns from scalding liquids as well as many cuts and bruises.

In my career at the hospital, I have been choked several times from the front and the back. I have been spat in my face. I have been bitten, slammed to the floor on my elbow and I have been punched in the face not to mention numerous bumps and bruises that I have received.

Since we are the Oregon State Hospital, we do not have the use of batons, pepper sprays, guns, or bean bag guns to use to protect staff from violent patients. We are trained to use our bodies, voices and team work to detain aggressive patients which has also caused some severe staff injuries. Yet the injured staff, after they have healed, continue to show up to work and provide the best care possible to our violent, aggressive patients.

Several years back before the new hospital was built, a female staff was watching a patient that was on a constant. At the other end of the hall a fight started with a couple of other patients. While staff were trying to contain the other patients, another patient whose room was across the hall from the constant, took advantage of the staff on constant and came up and began to punch her repeatedly in the face. The patient got the female staff down on the floor and was on top of her punching her in the head and the face nonstop until staff were able to get there and remove him. She had several of her teeth knocked out and had massive damage done to her face. It took multiple surgeries and dental work to reconstruct her face and repair her teeth not to mention hours of counselling. This staff member did return to work but was never the same.

We are the most dangerous agency to work for in the state. We are even more dangerous than any of the correctional facilities here in Oregon. According to BOLI we have the most documented SAIF claims. Because of this, the High-Risk Retirement Benefits would greatly benefit the staff at Oregon State Hospital.

My question to ALL of you is, do you wonder if each day you go to work is going to be the day you get assaulted or hurt and taken out by ambulance? Those of us wonder that everyday we go to work at Oregon State Hospital. Several staff end up getting injured whether it be major or minor. Something for you all to think about.

Lastly, I ask members of this committee to support HB 2701.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my experience and hope for the future.

Lisa Heicksen