



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

From: Alex Edwards

Date: 2/5/2024

Subject: Support for Public Safety Workforce Stabilization Act of 2024

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

My name is Alex Edwards, I am writing in support of HB 4045 Public Safety Workforce Stabilization to retain and recruit workers at the Oregon State Hospital (OSH) and 911 telecommunicators.

I began my career for OHA in 2023. I started as a Mental Health Therapist and transitioned to being an Activity Coordinator in 2022. My job today entails organizing, creating, and running treatment groups and activities within the secure perimeter of the campus. On any given day, I work with 70 different patients. My role as an activity coordinator provides patients with skills they can use when they transition back to the community and coping mechanisms that will help them from being readmitted.

Unfortunately, the investments the Oregon Legislature has made in mental and behavioral health services is insufficient. The underfunding of services and critical staffing needs impact the safety of the workforce and quality of care for patients. This has created a workplace filled with injuries and illnesses for state hospital workers, making the state's psychiatric institute the most dangerous place to work.

I believe HB 4045 would improve the recruitment and retention issues, in my experience I have seen many coworkers die within 6 months of retirement, partly due to the physical and psychological trauma they have received. With the lower retirement age and enhanced benefits recruitment and retainment of staff would be improved and workers at the Oregon state hospital would finally be compensated in a way to reflect the extremely difficult environment they work in.

Thank you,

Alex Edwards