



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

From: Haroun Bajal, OSH Workers, Salem Campus. CPS Couch

Date: 02/05/2024

RE: Support for HB 4045 Public Safety Workforce Stabilization Act of 2024

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

My name is Haroun Bajal, 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 am a resident of Portland, Oregon. In 2014, I embarked on my journey as a self-employed interpreter, which introduced me to the world of The Oregon State Hospitals. Subsequently, in 2017, I transitioned into the role of a Mental Health Therapist, and in April 2022, I was fortunate enough to be hired full-time to the position of a Collaborative Problem-Solving Coach. On any given day, I work with approximately 25 patients.

On the 16th of May 2022, I was working overtime on a unit. At one point in the shift, I was assigned Rounds and was severely assaulted. Doing rounds involves staff members walking through the units to ensure the safety and well-being of the patients. This assignment is given to 1 person per hour. While performing this assignment, I was attacked by a patient from behind. The patient was able to stab me three times with a ballpoint pen before swiftly retreating a few steps and discarding the pen.

The sudden assault left me disoriented and nauseous, with blood streaming from both sides of my head. Despite the dizziness, I managed to make my way to the nursing station, applying pressure to my head wounds to stem the bleeding. An ambulance was promptly called, and I was transported to the emergency department for immediate medical attention. This attack took me off the job for a period of three months, followed by a nearly one-year period of light duty. I have been diagnosed with PTSD and I am currently receiving medical treatment for this condition. Additionally, I have obtained ADA accommodation to be able to continue working.

Unfortunately, despite the investments the Oregon Legislature has made in mental and behavioral health services, more needs to be done. The underfunding of services and critical

staffing needs impacts the safety of the workforce and the quality of care for patients. This leads to workplace injuries and illnesses for state hospital workers, making the state's psychiatric institute the most dangerous place to work.

HB 4045 holds significance for me due to its ability to raise awareness about the immense stress faced by the staff responsible for caring for a highly challenging population. The safety and well-being of these individuals, who dedicate themselves wholeheartedly, are equally as important as those they serve.

OSH workers on the secure campus, like me, deserve improved retirement benefits that recognize the dignity and value of our years of service. These benefits are vital for the wellbeing of OSH workers who must often retire early due to the immense physical, emotional, and mental toll of their jobs. I ask members of the committee to fully support HB 4045. This bill will immensely help the state's psychiatric and nursing workforce in the secure psychiatric facility. We need the Legislature to support the workers at OSH so we can continue to do our jobs: serving patients.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Haroun Bajal