

March 19, 2025

TO: Senate Committee On Health Care

Testimony in Support of SB 537

FROM: KARL RUSTERHOLTZ

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the committee, I AM A REGISTERED NURSE AT UNITY CENTER FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN PORTLAND. I LIVE IN REDLAND, OR. UNITY PROVIDES ACUTE PSYCHIATRIC CARE & STABILIZATION FOR INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN THE METRO AREA. PRIOR TO UNITY, I WORKED AS AN ONCOLOGY NURSE. BOTH ROLES HAVE THEIR REWARDS & CHALLENGES. NO MATTER THE CHALLENGES, VIOLENCE SHOULD NOT BE A PART OF A NURSE'S WORKDAY. I AM HERE TO SPEAK IN SUPPORT OF SB 537 TO PREVENT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE. I HAVE EXPERIENCED VERBAL & PHYSICAL ASSAULTS — FROM HAVING A BUCKET OF EMESIS THROWN ON ME TO MULTIPLE PUNCHES TO MY HEAD BY A PATIENT. RATHER THAN LEAVE THE HOSPITAL, OR THE PROFESSION, I CHOSE TO ENGAGE WITH THE SYSTEM TO CREATE SAFER WORK SPACES FOR MYSELF AND MY PEERS. I HAVE BEEN ON THE SAFETY COMMITTEE FOR YEARS, THIS EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN EYE-OPENING AND SHOCKING. AT UNITY, OVER THE PAST YEAR, STAFF HAVE BEEN ASSAULTED HUNDREDS OF TIMES. FOR EXAMPLE, IN JUNE OF LAST SUMMER, STAFF WERE ASSAULTED 62 TIMES. MOST OF THOSE EVENTS DID NOT RESULT IN PHYSICAL INJURY BUT, YOU CAN IMAGINE, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT CAN BE SIGNIFICANT AND LONG-LASTING. IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT FOUR (4) OF THOSE 62 ASSAULTS IN A SINGLE MONTH RESULTED IN PERMANENT DAMAGE. ACTUAL NUMBERS CHANGE FROM MONTH TO MONTH BUT ONE POINT IS EXTREMELY CLEAR — HEALTHCARE WORKERS COME TO WORK EACH DAY OR NIGHT TO EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE, OR THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE. WE NEED TO DO BETTER WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING THE PEOPLE WHO ARE PROVIDING CARE TO OUR MOST VULNERABLE POPULATIONS. MY ASK IS THAT YOU SUPPORT SB 537 TO STOP WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE.

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Thank you for accepting my testimony and I urge your support of SB 537.