



Testimony in Support of SB 823

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Senate Committee on Health Care and Human Services

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Oregon Nurses Association

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of SB 823, which makes an unprecedented investment in our mental health system, and would dramatically increase the number of Oregonians in need of mental health services who can get the care they need when they need it.

ONA represents over 12,000 nurses and advanced practice nurses throughout Oregon. From large medical centers to small clinics, to county health departments, to correctional institutions to school based health centers, Oregon nurses work in a variety of settings.

Oregon nurses see the impact of mental health issues on their patients and families. Frequently, mental health patients enter the health care system through the emergency room, when a condition has gone untreated or unmanaged, and is much more acute than it would have been if earlier help had been available.

Other Oregonians struggling with mental illness don't find their way into treatment, and end up in the criminal justice system, or—as we see all too frequently—take their own lives, sometimes following a violent crime.

Estimates suggest as many as one in five people suffers from a mental illness. Increasing our state's capacity to provide the necessary and appropriate treatment and support will help these Oregonians live happier healthier lives. Enhancing mental health services in this way will complement health care reform efforts in Oregon, and while a significant investment is needed, providing care at the community level is likely to save money in the long term.

This infrastructure will build on what already exists, and will also provide supports for primary care and other providers who need to consult with a mental health specialist to best serve their patients.

Improving access to and availability of mental health services will better serve all Oregonians, and ONA encourages your support of SB 823.