



**Testimony in support of HB 2922**

May 13, 2013

House Health Care Committee

Teri Mills, RN, MS, CNE

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of a single-payer health care system. I'd also like to thank Representative Michael Dembrow for sponsoring this very important legislation, HB 2922.

My name is Teri Mills. I am a long-time nurse educator and a proud member AFT Oregon and the Oregon Nurses Association. I serve on the Oregon Nurses Association's Cabinet on Health Policy. Oregon's nurses make up the largest sector of the health care workforce, and year after year nurses are voted America's most trusted professionals according to Gallup polling, and their opinion is valued on providing affordable health care to all.

Despite the commitment of nurses and health care providers to provide the best possible care for every Oregonian, the current healthcare system is failing. Even after we implement the Affordable Care Act and Oregon's health systems transformation, many Oregonians will still be without health insurance. This problem became more real to me when I asked my nursing students at Portland Community College how many of them were uninsured. Over two-thirds of the class raised their hands. The average age of nursing students at Portland Community College is 33, making them ineligible to remain on their parents insurance while they receive their education. It is ironic to me that the people we are educating to become health professionals don't have access to the care they themselves will be providing. It's wrong! Even in the nursing profession itself, many of my colleagues are not covered by health insurance, because health care organizations find that health insurance is so expensive, they choose to hire nurses in part-time roles to avoid having to pay their employee's premiums.

Nurses who work on the frontlines of healthcare are all too aware of how this growing crisis continues to erode living standards, the social fabric of our communities, and the economic health of our country. Patients often access care when it is too late, making it more costly to provide, and in many cases causing their conditions to unnecessarily worsen.

There are many personal stories that illustrate this. A patient in his 30's came in to the emergency department with a ruptured appendix after suffering from severe abdominal pain for three days. He didn't come in sooner because he didn't want to risk bankrupting his family with an astronomical hospital bill. A 45-year-old patient suffered through months of productive coughing and other symptoms because as a single mom with three children she could not afford to seek care. When she finally came in she was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer.

I'm proud of the PCC Nursing Program, because we, like all accredited nursing programs in our state, teach evidence-based practice. This means we deliver nursing care based on science and facts not what we see or hear on television. We also need evidence-based health care policy. AFT Oregon and the Oregon Nurses Association support HB 2922 because every nurse's focus should be helping our

patients get well, not on what insurance plan they have and if the care they need will be covered.

HB 2922 is cost effective. Administrative costs that coincide with private insurance will be eliminated and will allow patients to choose their own provider. In our current system, many insurance carriers charge their members more money if they seek care out of the company's defined service area, or if the member does not choose a provider listed under their plan.

A single-payer health system would allow thousands of Oregonians to access care and would provide tremendous opportunity for job growth throughout the healthcare industry in our state. This undoubtedly would be a boom to our economy. Research suggests expanding Medicare to cover all Americans would create 2.6 million new jobs. That translates to approximately 35,000 new jobs in Oregon (Dixon, 2009). Small businesses would no longer have to compete with each other to provide the best benefit package, because health care would already be provided for all. The economy could benefit when people are free to change jobs, start a business or retire sooner because their health insurance is not tied to employment.

Every fall I ask my students why they want to become a nurse, and every year they tell me they want to become nurses because they want to touch lives, they want to make a difference, and they want to help keep their fellow Oregonians well. Today, you may well make that kind of difference for a fellow Oregonian, a neighbor, or perhaps even your own family member. By voting YES on HB 2922, you have the opportunity to create jobs, provide affordable health care for every Oregon resident. Most importantly, please recognize that by voting YES, you might well be saving a life. Thank you.

#### References:

Dixon, B. (2009). Medicare-for-all will create 2.6 million new jobs, say CA nurses. *Black Agenda Report*. Retrieved on March 3, 2011 <http://www.blackagendareport.com/?q=node/11014>