



Testimony in Support of to HB 2858

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Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

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Co-Chairs Nathanson and Bates and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of House Bill 2858.

ONA represents more than 13,000 Oregon Nurses, Nursing Students and Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurse Specialists. Oregon Nurses make up the largest segment of Oregon's health care work force, and practice in nearly every health care setting, from large hospitals to small local clinics, from corrections to school based health centers, and community-based public health.

Our members see firsthand the need for more primary care providers in Oregon's rural communities. The goals of Oregon's health care transformation are to improve care quality, accessibility, and reliability, while limiting costs. By renewing funding for the Primary Health Care Loan Forgiveness Program Fund, HB 2858 addresses all these goals and is a critical tool in correcting the shortage of primary care providers in Oregon's rural areas.

In parts of the state, Nurse Practitioners are the only primary care providers in the area, and even in places where there are multiple providers, NPs are absolutely critical in helping meet the primary care needs of our population, particularly as health reform is implemented and more people have insurance coverage. The Primary Care Loan Forgiveness Program appropriately includes Nurse Practitioners and can help build this workforce and meet our primary care needs.

The Primary Health Care Loan Forgiveness Program identifies students who want to practice rural health care early and helps students from rural Oregon realize a career in health care. By identifying these students early, qualifying programs can provide the right training and financial support to allow providers to practice in underserved rural areas. This is a critical tool in helping develop the health care workforce we need in rural areas and increasing patient access to care.

Data shows that primary care providers produce better health outcomes at lower costs, and research has found that patients with a regular primary care provider are less likely to be obese, less likely to be hospitalized, and have lower health care costs than those patients who are not regularly treated by a primary care provider. Research also shows that students who grow up in rural areas or decide they want to practice rural health care early are the providers most likely to continue practicing rural health care in rural communities.

House Bill 2858 makes a small short-term investment to help solve a large, long-term problem.

ONA urges your support of HB 2858.