



Testimony in Support of SB 454 and HB 2005

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Chairs Dembrow and Holvey and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) and the Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA) in support of SB 454 and HB 2005.

My name is Anna Stiefvater. I am a public health nurse, Chair of ONA's Cabinet on Health Policy and a Board member for the OPHA. As you may know, many working Oregonians do not currently have access to earned sick time on the job. This almost certainly ensures that workers without sick days will choose to go to work when they are ill. When workers go to work sick, not only do they delay their own treatment and recovery, they also put their co-workers—who likely do not have sick days, either—and members of the public at risk of being exposed to and infected by contagious illnesses, such as the flu. SB 454 and HB 2005 will help ensure more workers are able to take time off work to recover when they are ill.

When employers do not provide sick days for their employees, it fosters an environment that encourages workers to come to work ill, and forces low-wage employees to choose between paying their rent or working while sick. Similarly, many parents will have to make the tough choice to send their children to school or daycare sick, because they are not able to stay home and care for them.

Allowing workers to earn sick days on the job also supports Oregon's efforts to transform our health care system. As a nurse, I understand the importance of Oregon's health system transformation efforts and just how much is at risk if we are not successful in crafting a system that provides quality care for more patients. If workers do not have time to access the primary and preventive care they need to stay healthy, their treatable illnesses will likely worsen, becoming increasingly expensive and posing long-term health risks. Oregon needs to implement policies, like earned sick days, to support the national and statewide healthcare reform efforts and promote good public health.

Healthy communities are created through the implementation of health conscious policies, such as Earned Sick Days. SB 454 and HB 2005, a state-wide earned sick days policy will not, on its own, stop the spread of illness within Oregon, but it will allow more working Oregonians and their families to stay home to recover from illness when they are ill, access the primary and preventive care they need, and prevent low-income families from making tough choices between their health and their financial security.

As a public health nurse, I've spent my career working with at-risk mothers and children in Oregon. I teach the importance of healthy habits. I provide support and encouragement as they work to make changes in their behavior. I assist them in accessing available community resources. We work together to prevent illness and ultimately improve the quality of their lives. Unfortunately, if our state doesn't support healthy lifestyles through policies such as earned sick days, many of the families I work with will not have a fair chance at good health. I urge you to help empower working Oregonians and their families to be healthier by supporting SB 454 and HB 2005.