

Testimony in support of HB 2837

House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

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Meg Portwood, FNP

Chair McKeown and Members of the Committee:

My name is Meg Portwood and I am a family nurse practitioner.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 2837, which would allow nurse practitioners to sign seat belt exemption requests.

I have been in private practice in Lincoln City since 1976. We provide primary health care to people of all ages in our rural health clinic. Our services include acute and chronic care as well as wellness examinations. We do well child, well adult exams, sports exams; I do driver physicals for the FMSCA. Nurse Practitioners are licensed by the Oregon state Board of Nursing, and practice independently in Oregon.

My clinic is a recognized Patient Centered Primary Care Home, and we provide care within the Medical Home model. We are also part of the Samaritan Coordinated Care Organization (CCO). Many of our patients are covered by Intercommunity Health Network CCO; we are participating in a pilot project regarding a new payment model, per member per month with the CCO.

As part of the services we offer as a patient centered primary care home and part of a CCO, we are case managers for our patients. We have over 4500 patient visits each year. We work very hard to coordinate care for our patients with specialty providers, and are known as a patient's primary care provider. Unless I refer them to a specialist, I'm the main provider that my patients see.

The reason that I am here is to address our need to be able to sign Seat Belt/Safety restraint system exemption requests to ODOT. I honestly thought this was part of the nurse practitioner scope of practice, and did sign a form last year for a patient who lives in Lincoln City and has naso-pharyngeal cancer. His oncology team is in Corvallis, and as part of his treatment, he had to be driven to Corvallis for chemotherapy and radiation therapy, sometimes daily, sometimes every other week. The drive takes anywhere from 1 ½ to 2 hours one way. Throughout his radiation treatments to his head and neck, he developed pain, skin irritation and swelling of his face and neck, and was not able to eat or drink, so a feeding tube was placed in his abdomen so that he can receive liquid feedings through the tube. He has lost over 80 pounds. The safety restraint in the car crosses his neck and upper chest and the lower belt crosses his feeding tube; he is physically not able to wear the restraint. His oncologist and team in Corvallis suggested he contact his primary care provider (me) to get the exemption request form signed, as this is not something that the oncologist normally does.

I did sign the form, believing the process to be a routine part of my scope of practice, and when the patient turned it in, he was told that only physicians licensed by the Oregon Medical Board or a physician licensed with a Veteran's Hospital could sign. This law has been in effect since 1990; prior to that year, I did sign similar exemption forms for our regular patients under similar circumstances that impacted their health and made it impossible for them to wear a seat belt.

My patient's oncologist still declined to sign the form, so the patient had to find another physician licensed by the Oregon Medical Board to sign the form; he had never seen this physician, and has no intention to see him again. It was a huge hardship for him to see yet another provider to have a form signed; his physical state was very fragile at the time, and this was truly a huge burden. Not to mention that the physician who eventually signed the form was far less familiar with this patient's circumstances than I was.

I do support the use of safety restraints, but based on knowledge and experience, I do realize that exemptions must be available, for situations like the one my patient faced. As a Nurse Practitioner, I have the knowledge and expertise to sign the form and certify that my patient can't wear a safety restraint. As the primary care providers for our patients we manage their medications, coordinate treatments, and refer to specialists when indicated. In the changing landscape of health care provision, we need to be able to provide all aspects of care. Please add Nurse Practitioners to the professionals who can sign the form, and allow us to continue to do our jobs working with and for our patients.

Thank you for your time and consideration.