



Sheri Malstrom, RN  
Oregon Nurses Association  
April 3, 2015  
Support SB 845

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of SB 845. My name is Sheri Malstrom. I have been a public health nurse specializing in child and maternal health for the past thirty years.

The Oregon Nurses Association is Oregon's oldest and largest nursing union and professional association, and is proud to represent over 13,000 registered nurses, advanced practice nurses and nursing students in Oregon. ONA supports policies that focus on increasing access to quality health care. SB 845 helps remove barriers to care that have been put in place for some of Oregon's lowest wage workers, by providing a strong disincentive for employers who cut worker's hours to avoid paying the cost of health insurance.

The nurses I work with provide care to some of the most vulnerable Oregonians. We care for pregnant women, new mothers and their infants and children. We counsel families about their health and provide guidance to ensure families are able to access the care they need.

The health and wellbeing of the mother directly impacts the health of the fetus and what kind of care giver she will be for her children. Too commonly, I care for women who were employed full time before they became pregnant and had employer based health insurance through their fulltime employment. Unfortunately, as their pregnancy became known to their employer, they find their hours reduced. This results not only in a loss of wages, but health insurance coverage, as well. Many of the women I work with tell they feel as their employers believe they are expendable, and cut their hours back because they don't want to pay for benefits for an employee on maternity leave or additional health insurance coverage for the child.

As a result, they have to switch from the prenatal provider that they started with that took their private insurance, to a different provider that takes Oregon Health Plan. Finding a new OHP provider and getting through their waiting list takes time. This very often causes a break in their continuity of maternity care and leaving them and their baby at greater risk for a poorer outcome. This in turn leads to a greater burden on the state as well. When a break in prenatal care occurs during the later second trimester onward, the woman misses out on important screening for warning signs of premature birth. The cost of premature birth is staggering, not to mention the cost of a potentially life time handicapping condition that could have been avoided with uninterrupted prenatal care. And again, these costs are shouldered by the state.

As a public health nurse, I urge you to support of HB SB 845 to help ensure Oregonians who work hard have access to the care they need without having to rely on the state.