

Testimony in Support of SB 469  
Cheryl Brewer  
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Co Chairs Bates and Nathanson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Cheryl Brewer, and I have been a nurse for 14 years. I am a staff nurse, fill in charge nurse and am the co-chair for the staffing committee of my hospital. Additionally, I am a member of the Oregon Nurse Staffing Collaborative and a member of ONA Cabinet on Health Policy and was on the workgroup that came up with the bill before you.

Today I want to tell you what this bill means to me as a staff nurse.

Roughly three years ago, my hospital hired consultants which recommended that they freeze hiring. As a result, nurses were frequently being asked to take care patients that they did not have adequate training for, pushed to take patients when struggling with their current assignment due to how sick the patients were, required to work mandatory overtime in excess of the current law and regularly missed meals and breaks. After exhausting every opportunity to resolve these issues with administration we reported our concerns to the Oregon Health Authority about a year and a half ago.

It took over four months for OHA to send one person to respond to the 10+ nurses that filed the initial complaint and over one hundred nurses attempted to speak with the auditor. Due to the number of nurses wishing to speak with the auditor, they scheduled a second day and allowed nurses to send an email. After several months, the OHA cited multiple deficiencies, half of which are still outstanding and unresolved. An additional complaint was made in September, 2014. To date, that complaint is still outstanding. Enforcement is critical to ensuring safe patient care in Oregon, and the timelines included in SB 469 will ensure more prompt enforcement of the law, which will lead to more timely resolution of any problems or violations, and more quickly restore our ability to provide excellent patient care.

An important piece of the proposed bill is the creation of an Advisory Board which would be comprised of experts; managers and staff nurses whose goal would be to look for trends and opportunities, to advise the OHA in their investigations and would report to the legislature. This Nurse Staffing Advisory Board would increase transparency around staffing, and would also provide additional expertise to the state. The Advisory Board is modeled after a staffing committee, and I believe will be an important part of improving our staffing law.

One additional component of the bill that I'd like to highlight is the role of mediation in the case where a staffing committee comes to an impasse and can't approve a staffing plan. SB 469 creates a process where a staffing committee approaching an impasse can get a one month extension to continue to work on the plan, and then triggers a mandatory mediation where a mediator helps the committee get to an agreement based upon the required elements of the staffing plan. This is another mechanism that should help ensure that there is quick intervention when a problem arises.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and am willing to answer question you may have. I ask that you support SB 469.