



TO: House Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development
FROM: Cindy Robert
RE: Concerns about HB 2540
DATE: March 21, 2017

On behalf of the Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities, which represents Oregon's 18 private nonprofit colleges educating more than 35,000 students, and awarding 47 percent of Oregon degrees earned in the health professions, I want to share the following concerns about HB 2540.

The Alliance has bachelor degree-granting registered nursing programs at Concordia University, George Fox University, Linfield College, and University of Portland. At the graduate level, the University of Portland offers Masters in Nursing Education and Doctorate in Nursing Practice degree programs. Additionally, Northwest Christian University offers a bachelor degree in Nursing Administration.

In the 2015-16 academic year, these schools awarded 576 bachelor degrees in nursing and two nursing education masters degrees.

The applied baccalaureate program proposed in HB 2540, which moves nursing education away from the Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree that nurses earn at 4-year baccalaureate schools, is a significant departure from the high standards for nursing education, practice, and advanced practice in nursing Oregonians have come to expect.

If there were a nursing shortage or the workforce was depleted, there might be cause to consider short-term measures to address an unmet need. However, we understand that, according to recent research, no such shortage exists.

The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) is a collaborative of practitioners, the state Board of Nursing, the Oregon Nurses Associations, health systems and schools. The main mission of OCN is to facilitate research and collaboration for Oregon's nursing workforce to support informed, well-prepared, diverse and exceptional nursing professionals.

Two recent OCN studies indicate that there is no shortage of nurses; no current demand for nurses that is not being met:

The OCN 2016 Nurse Demand Study

- Over the past decade the nurse vacancy rate in hospitals and health systems has been less than two percent;
- These health systems report very little difficulty in recruiting new graduates into their organizations;

- The more challenging issue is recruiting nurses with specialized training and experience;
- The most challenging issue is the inability of these health systems to recruit nurse supervisors, unit-level nurse managers, or nurse executives (between 44 percent to 62 percent report this recruitment as VERY difficult).
- These issues will not be resolved by increasing enrollment, rather a focus must be placed on graduate education, succession planning, and leadership/career development to meet this need.

The second study shows a shortage of nursing educators and a number of faculty openings in current nursing programs that are not being filled:

The OCN 2016 Nurse Faculty Workforce report

- An insufficient number of nurse faculty is widely recognized as one of the key barriers to increasing enrollment;
- This is primarily due to compensation; practicing nurses earn much more than faculty, particularly at the community college level;
- The nurse faculty vacancy rate is 10.7 percent in the west compared to 8.3 percent nationally;
- Three of five Oregon nursing programs reported having one or more unfilled faculty positions.

The faculty shortage issue will not be resolved by increasing enrollment capacity at the community colleges, where an educator qualified to teach in an ABN program may not be assumed to be qualified to teach at the BSN level. In fact, expanding capacity at the community college level could exacerbate the faculty shortage problem.

In summary, in terms of the workforce pipeline for nursing staff, the challenges will not be addressed with a less educated and experienced workforce. In fact, that could intensify the challenges, which are these:

- (1) A shortage of nurse educators;
 - (2) The need for expanded capacity in nursing residencies in specialized areas of care;
- and,
- (3) Additional clinical settings for enhanced learning opportunities for students.

Finally I want to assure you that the Alliance schools work well with community colleges often establishing collaborative programs in certain fields and geographic areas. This work extends to the field of nursing where, as example, Linfield College has established transfer protocols with Oregon community colleges to allow their nursing students to earn a BSN at Linfield, either online or on our Portland campus. Accessible, affordable, attainable. I assure you we are doing what we can and innovating to meet workforce needs.