

Date: March 20, 2017

To: Members of the Oregon

Legislature RE: HB-2540

I am the Administrator/CEO of the Edward C. Allworth Oregon Veterans Home in Lebanon Oregon. The home is managed by Veterans Care Centers of Oregon, a 501(c)(3) that operates the two State Veterans' Homes on behalf of the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs. I have been a long term care Administrator since 1990 and been actively involved in various committees for both the Oregon Health Care Association and the Washington Health Care Association and am a founding member of M.O.V.E. (Making Oregon Vital for Elders). M.O.V.E. is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to changing the way health and long-term care services are provided to older Oregonians. I am also currently appointed to the Medicaid Long Term Care Quality and Reimbursement Advisory Council.

One thing that has been consistent throughout my nearly three decades in healthcare is the challenge of finding adequate staff to care for the residents I serve, and this is especially true for patient care/clinical staff at all levels. Nothing underscores this challenge more than the estimated 250-300 open positions for Registered Nurses (RNs) in Oregon alone. I personally see this shortage every time we need to fill a vacant license nurse position where an employment ad for a RN/LPN may run weeks without a single applicant. Currently, approximately 55% of the budgeted RN hours for the two Oregon Veterans Homes must be filled by Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in order to provide the care we wish to provide for the Veterans that we serve. This does not mean that we are providing inadequate care, but, it does mean that we are unable to provide the level of care that we wish to provide by going well above and beyond what is required by state and federal regulations.

If passed, signed into law, and implemented, HB-2540 would provide an additional source of Registered Nurses for not only the long-term-care profession, but for all levels of care, from hospital critical care units to physicians' offices. As a nation, it accomplishes little if we pass various "care acts" if those of us who are charged with providing that care cannot obtain the resources required to do so. Likewise, the care system gains nothing if additional regulations, with attending fines, are passed to ensure that high quality care is delivered, if the profession that is expected to provide that care cannot recruit caregivers.

I would respectfully request that the Oregon Legislature pass, and the Governor sign into law, HB-2540, giving our educational system one more arrow in their quiver to target the health care needs of 21st Century Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Kelly Odegaard, MBA, LNHA  
Administrator/CEO  
Lebanon Veterans Home