



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 997

March 30, 2017

Senate Committee on Health Care

Chris Hewitt

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony on Senate Bill 997. ONA represents 15,000 registered nurses providing care in nearly every setting imaginable across our state. Oregon's nurses have a strong history of advocating on behalf of policies that serve to expand affordable health insurance coverage and increase investment in access to affordable care for some of our most underserved populations. Through ensuring greater employer accountability in providing health coverage to workers and recapturing additional state funds to support health care costs, SB 997 strongly reflects these principles.

Many ONA members provide care to some of the most vulnerable Oregonians and frequently see patients that are not offered employer coverage or find their hours reduced, which not only results in decreased income, but often the loss of health insurance coverage. This current employer coverage loophole translates into higher rates of uninsured Oregonians today and more Oregon Health Plan (OHP) recipients or a lack of continuity of care from having to switch providers. Altogether, these factors result in a greater overall cost burden for the state.

When employers have workers who are forced to rely on medical assistance programs rather than an employer-based plan, these expenses are then shifted onto taxpayers, subsidizing health-care costs for low-income employees. Particularly in light of our Oregon's current budget crisis this biennium, the state can simply no longer afford to subsidize the health care costs of large employers who must otherwise be responsible for providing this coverage to their employees.

SB 997, the Oregon Health Insurance Accountability Act, will ensure that employers are paying their fair share of health care costs by imposing penalties for those who do not offer affordable coverage to employees working least 32 hours per week and receive their coverage via a taxpayer funded assistance program. The funds recouped from penalties will be reinvested back into our state to support health care programs, including increased reimbursements for providers in health profession shortage areas and supporting vital health safety net services.

As long as we maintain an employer-based health care model in our state, ONA supports greater accountability for employers to provide affordable, quality health care to their employees, or otherwise reimburse the state to share more equitably in the cost of providing coverage through public assistance programs. SB 997 is a practical measure that will increase access to care while saving valuable tax payer dollars.

ONA urges your support for SB 997.