



Testimony in Opposition to SB 559 & 560

February 13, 2017

Senate Workforce Committee

Teri Mills, RN, MS, CNE

Chair Taylor and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association.

My name is Teri Mills. I am an ONA member who has worked as a nurse educator for 40 years. ONA members who work as educators at Oregon's public institutions, care for our kids in K-12 schools, work at county health departments throughout the state, and are frontline workers at Oregon's Health and Science University are all members of the Public Employee Retirement System.

There is a shortage of nurses working in the public sector in Oregon. This shortage has a significant impact on Oregon's nursing workforce and the health of many Oregonians. We rely on public sector nurses to educate and prepare our future nursing workforce, and currently we turn away hundreds of qualified nursing school applicants each year because we don't have enough educators. The Oregon State Legislature recommends one school nurse for every 750 students, and our schools currently have less than one nurse for each 4,000 students and according to the Oregon Center for Nursing, turnover in our public health workforce has doubled since 2004.

Despite the fact that we rely on public sector nurses to care for our most vulnerable populations, their total compensation is far less than the average nurse working in the private sector. For example, a staff nurse who has works 30 years in a county health department makes on average \$30 an hour, compared to their counterpart in a private hospital who's making \$50 an hour after 30 years of service.

A stable and secure retirement is a vital and necessary tool for recruiting and retaining nurses in these public sector positions. According to The Oregon Center for Nursing's report, "The Demand for Nursing Professionals," Oregon is facing a shortage of nurses in the public sector, and compensation is a significant factor in that. Further eroding retirement benefits for current public sector nurses will only harm our ability to retain our current workforce and recruit nurses in the future.

Jennifer Gould, a Multnomah County public health nurse who couldn't be here today asked me to help share her story to better demonstrate what deep retirement cuts OPSRP members are facing with Senate Bills 559 and 560.

Certified actuarial analysis ran the numbers to determine what SB 559 and SB 560 would mean for her upon retirement. Her individual account program would be slashed by 51 percent--over half—if SB 560 passes and 6 percent of Jennifer's salary is redirected to pay the state's pension obligation.

In addition to losing 51 percent of her individual account, she faces losing 39 percent of her monthly pension if SB 559 passes.

These reductions are on top of the 12 percent reduction Jennifer is already taking because of the 2013 cost-of-living reductions.

I urge you to strongly consider the impact SB 559 and 560 will have on our ability to provide care for the Oregonians who rely on nurses in the public sector.