



Testimony on COVID Conditions and Response

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Senate Committee on Labor & Business

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Good afternoon Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the committee. My name is Paul van Waardenburg. I am currently Chair of the Cabinet on Health Policy at Oregon Nurses Association and I currently work outside of the acute care setting. I work in home hospice in Lane county. ONA represents 15,000 registered nurses throughout the state the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to share the experiences of our members and to offer reasonable solutions to address many of their challenges. We would also like to acknowledge the loss, suffering and trauma we have all faced, resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic and ongoing forest fires.

Our nurses are on the frontlines, performing a disproportionate share of patient care and an equally disproportionate share of the risk. Their dedication sustained health systems, helped to restore patients back to health, and demonstrated true courage during adversity. It was their expertise and skill that directly impacted the surge projections. In real terms, they risked their lives to keep the rest of us safe and supported. At the same time, our nurses experienced serious challenges, some which were beyond anyone's control, some which could have been addressed yet still exist. We will take this opportunity to discuss ongoing nursing concerns in the areas of PPE availability and the failure to appropriately address the needs of our state's most vulnerable residents who receive their care via home health, hospice, and long term care.

I am here to speak on personal protective equipment, PPE, for nursing outside of the hospital and those serving in rural Oregon. My coworkers and I are working in community settings such as homes, assisted living, and skilled nursing. These are high risk areas for outbreak and from my experience the safety precautions and safety equipment resources vary tremendously. These settings are where high risk populations reside and it is concerning when there aren't uniform guidelines from place to place. My ask today is for nurse leaders in these settings, a place at the table to offer input for PPE guidelines at the state level.

When you look at the areas most impacted during this nursing shortage, these settings are the most impacted. Nurses in these settings are questioning their own mortality during Covid-19 outbreaks and their ability to provide safe care in preventing outbreaks in the community they serve. This is stressing a system that is not only being utilized more during the pandemic, but already has limited bodies and often is a more aged nursing workforce without proper replacement measures in sight.

Please consider this testimony in support of patients and the nurses who care for them in varied settings. And please consider Oregon nurses in rural communities looking out for their neighbors and loved ones. The opportunity to speak on safe patient care, worker protections, and public health strategy needs varying lenses to create holistic change. It is long overdue and time that we address the needs and challenges that occur outside traditional hospital settings.