

I am writing in support of Senator Roblan's proposal for Senate Bill 754.

The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) cited an Oregon Office of Rural Health Report (2017) that stated, "...rural communities across the state face increasing pressure to recruit and retain qualified nurses." Many employers in Oregon are facing problems with maintaining an adequate workforce (OCN, The Demand for Nursing Professionals in Oregon, 2018). The nursing shortage is real, and community college nursing programs are important entities and community partners in providing the workforce with registered nurses.

As a Nurse Educator for six years and Nurse Administrator for nearly nine years at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC), this bill is appreciated for several reasons. It is difficult to fill vacant nursing faculty positions; keeping nursing faculty can be a challenge; and workloads are typically heavier in nursing education versus nursing positions outside academia. When vacant nurse educator positions are advertised, there are very few, if any, applications from qualified master's prepared nurses. The cost to earn a master's degree to be eligible to be a nurse educator is substantial, and many begin their journey as a nurse educator with student loan debt. Some bachelor prepared nurses are hired with the expectation that a master's degree will be obtained within a couple of years of hire. A master's degree in nursing is expensive, and it can be difficult to work at a lower salary as a nurse educator while obtaining the required education.

BMCC is a small community college located in Pendleton, a community of approximately 16,000 residents. BMCC admits 24 students per year into the two-year nursing program, and nursing students graduate with an Associate of Applied Science degree. At BMCC we are fortunate to currently have five full-time faculty and a couple of consistent part-time faculty that assist with clinical education. A few years ago, BMCC's nursing program had to reduce its admitted cohort from 24 students to 16 students for two years, with one of the reasons being the inability to fill two vacant full-time faculty positions. Although we currently have all five full-time faculty positions filled, it is difficult to retain faculty, and we have experienced turnover the past few years. Once nursing faculty begin their nurse educator role, it quickly becomes evident that workload is higher than nurses practicing outside academia.

The inability to recruit and retain qualified nursing faculty is one of the biggest issues affecting the nursing shortage. Lack of nursing faculty (as well as a lack of appropriate clinical site availability) causes a bottleneck in the ability to maintain or increase student enrollments and, ultimately, graduating students eligible to sit for the National Council Licensing Exam for Registered Nurses and begin working as registered nurses.

Although a recent publication by the OCN stated that Oregon's current workforce is younger than in the recent past and more younger nurses are entering the workforce (OCN, Aging Trends in Oregon's

Nursing Workforce, 2017), their report entitled "Oregon's Nurse Faculty: Why Are They Leaving?" (2017), indicates that more than 50 percent of active nurse faculty indicated they planned to retire within 10 years. The question as to how Oregon will educate future registered nurses is uncertain. The tax credit is an innovative and creative way to assist small rural community colleges to recruit and retain qualified nursing faculty and, in turn, assist in alleviating the nursing shortage in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

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