



Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 2454

April 30, 2019

Senate Committee on Business and General Government

Deborah Riddick JD, RN

Good afternoon Chair Riley, Vice Chair Girod, and members of the committee. My name is Deborah Riddick. I represent the 15,000 members of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon (NPO). We are currently opposed to HB 2454, as written, because it unintentionally creates a public health and safety risk that we cannot support, in good conscience.

Nursing practice requires a highly-skilled workforce whose abilities, or deficiencies, can literally be a matter of life or death. As a State, we clearly recognize this by requiring that licensees meet very specific and rigorous requirements. One of the State's highest charges is to promote public health and safety. If adopted, the public safety risk imbedded in HB 2454's two-year provisional license would demonstrate a disregard of this pledge at the expense of our most vulnerable residents. To allow provisional licensees access to unsuspecting patients is a breach of trust and is a position the ONA is not willing to stake its reputation in support of.

Our nurse members, throughout the state, understand our current provider shortage best. They are on the frontlines and, despite these challenges, continue to provide consistently, high-quality care. We agree that our provider shortage limits access to health services and strains our existing system. However, HB 2454 puts patient safety and public trust at risk in the interest of expediency. It dramatically extends the verification process for out-of-state licensees to up to two years. To provide context, it takes two years to earn an Associate Degree in Nursing, the entry level qualification for to sit for RN exam and current nursing licenses are granted for a two-year period. We are unequivocally committed to safe nursing practice and to upholding our state's high nursing standards. Consistent with that commitment, we urge you to consider amending this bill.

We agree that the state's rural communities experience the challenges of provider shortages far more acutely than other parts of the state. But we believe that the two-year provisional licensure would create further disparities for the region. What this bill would do is create a two-tiered provider class and would expose rural communities to providers who would not be qualified to practice, without verification, in any other part of the state. Our members are currently unable to identify any rural patients who agree that provisionally licensed nurses are worth the risk. We agree, and we believe our rural communities deserve the same qualified nursing staff as the rest of the state. As a member of the Oregon Rural Health Association, ONA has supported bills that appropriately address the unique needs these communities; we get it. A fast-track to care that advances a lower qualification standard, even temporarily, ignores the potential consequences and the sets a bad precedence.

We understand the intent and commend the sponsor for putting this issue before you today; it's an important one. We welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to amend the bill, restoring safeguards that more adequately balance public health and safety with the need to address our statewide provider shortage. We urge your support to amend HB 2454.