



Testimony in Support of House Bill 4029

February 6, 2020

House Committee on Health Care

Deborah Riddick, JD RN

Good afternoon Chair Salinas, Vice Chairs Nosse and Hayden, and members of the committee. My name is Deborah Riddick. I am the Director of Government Relations for the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). We represent 15,000 registered nurses throughout the state and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon. The ONA supports HB 4029 which prohibits nonprofit hospital from requiring patient to apply for medical assistance before screening for or providing financial assistance.

Our nurses, throughout the state, proudly provide a disproportionate amount of healthcare services, in and out of traditional facilities. We are, in many instances, the translators of community need and values. As care providers, case managers, and patient advocates, nurses witness the negative impact economic instability and insufficient community resources have on health outcomes. We also are acutely aware of the need for community benefits guidelines that more accurately address the needs of an increasingly more complex patient population. HB 4029 provides a framework that more appropriately balances the interests of both our hospitals and the patients they serve.

The ONA believes that meaningful financial assistance programs are the backbone of community benefits and that patients' rights and billing transparency are a widely recognized best practice. We also believe that requiring patients to apply for Medicaid, in light of the recent Supreme Court "public charge" decision, would prompt many of our most vulnerable residents from seeking timely, cost-effective treatment. At a time when global viruses threaten public health and strain health systems, it would be shortsighted and potentially catastrophic to create additional barriers to care.

The original expectation of community benefits, as a charity care offset, has evolved alongside the understanding that healthy communities require strategic planning, resources and partnerships. And it's important to remember that the industry's tax-exempt status reduces revenue that the State would, otherwise, collect to address many of the qualifying offsets, in furtherance of its public health responsibility. HB 4029 is the product of years of collaboration and supports transparency and accountability improvements as a compliment to federal law. As a result, ONA supports the provisions outlined in HB 4029 and urge you to do the same.