



## **Testimony in Support of House Bill 2590**

House Committee on Education

Deborah Riddick JD, RN

Good afternoon Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Neron and Weber, 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 and professional members, and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon. The ONA supports HB 2590, which would establish a Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education.

It is no secret that Oregon remains one of the least diverse states in the nation; <https://multco.us/file/24874/download>. In 1990, Non-Hispanic Whites made up 90.8% of our population; a decade later that figure fell well below the national average at 85.5%. Studies have shown that factors such as psychological and behavioral climate, structural and compositional diversity, and historic institutional exclusion all play a significant role in student success and graduation.

The ONA commends the sponsors of HB 2590 for their acknowledgement of these barriers and for elevating this important value proposition; the best and most resonant solutions must include community input. Recognizing that human experience is personal, and powerful, this bill begins the serious work to unearth root causes challenging many students of color. These frequently overlooked students and their families have an opportunity to positively impact structural change. This collaboration offers a space to develop institutional trust and truly make higher learning accessible to every Oregonian.

The ONA also supports HB 2590 because the Taskforce's work and success are tied to the diversification of our nursing and health care workforce. Research provides that patient outcomes improve when the attending workforce reflects the community it serves. For communities of color, who must translate cultural values and norms to providers, who practice within systems that have not prioritized structural changes that affirm lived experience and fail to accommodate their distinct needs, HB 2590 is critical. It addresses discriminatory and culturally insensitive practices that limit agency and leave many Oregonians marginalized and economically disadvantaged. It promotes a root cause analysis that will provide insights and direction to improve educational diversity efforts across the state. If educational barriers to these professions aren't addressed, our pipeline functions like a clogged faucet; only a fraction of its potential flows.

Practically speaking, educational attainment and health care status are interrelated. The more education you acquire, the better your health status. The healthier you are, the greater your ability to engage in educational advancement. Both lead to a more productive citizenry and better quality of life. HB 2590 is a significant step towards dismantling systemic barriers that will make our state truly more inclusive. The ONA supports this bill and urges your support, as well.