

March 23, 2021

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Felisa Hagins, and I am the Political Director of SEIU Local 49. I am testifying on behalf of SEIU 49 and SEIU 503. Together, our two locals have 85,000 members in Oregon and SW Washington, including more than 8,000 hospital and clinic workers and 30,000 health care and care providers in long term care. Workers at every level have been under a tremendous amount of stress to provide the best patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am here today to testify in opposition to SB 780 unless the committee amends the measure to include expanded whistleblower protections for all healthcare workers.

Last year, Modern Health Care named The Front-Line Worker the Most Influential Person in Healthcare. “From doctors and nurses to respiratory therapists and anesthesiologists to environmental service workers and administrators, healthcare workers have, as so many across the nation have proclaimed, have been the true heroes of the pandemic....To protect themselves and those they care for, they have collectively used their voices to demand better protections, better staffing ratios and hazard pay, changes they hope will outlast the pandemic.” On December 23, 2020, Kaiser Health Network reported that at least 2,300 health care workers had died in the pandemic since March 2020, and a majority of the health care workers who lost their lives have been people of color.

SB 780 will provide liability protections to hospitals, health systems, and some health care providers during the COVID pandemic. I have spent hours talking with frontline hospital workers, and I don't think any piece of legislation, including this liability limitation, will provide peace of mind for the difficult decisions they face due to COVID.

However, if the committee moves forward with SB 780, SEIU strongly encourages inclusion of an amendment to expand the whistleblower protections to other health care workers in facilities who have and will continue to have a direct impact on patient care.

This pandemic has highlighted the role all frontline health care workers have in preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Many health care workers, not just doctors and nurses, are responsible for implementing, enforcing, and practicing safe operating procedures to protect patients from the exposure and increased consequences of COVID-19. Environmental service workers are critical to stopping the spread, Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) spend equitable amounts of time and attention to COVID patients as nurses to provide the best care possible, and respiratory therapists are critical at every juncture in the fight for life and death with COVID patients. Providing quality patient care is a team activity and every member of the team functions at its peak performance when every member's voice is valued. These workers should have the protections needed to speak up without fearing retaliation or job loss when the standard of care is not met. I am asking for your support on an amendment to add whistleblower protections for all healthcare workers whose work impacts a patient's standard of care. Thank you.



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