



Service Employees International Union – Oregon State Council

February 3, 2022

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, we are Felisa Hagins from SEIU Local 49 and Courtney Graham from SEIU Local 503. On behalf of SEIU Locals 49 and 503, we write in strong support of Future Ready Oregon, SB 1545. This package is a transformative investment in Oregon's workforce and workers, and we especially are interested in the investments this package will make in the healthcare workforce, which SEIU represents.

Together, SEIU 49 and 503 represent 85,000 working Oregonians. Our mission is to achieve a higher standard of living for our members, their families, and their dependents by elevating social conditions and striving to create a more just society. We represent more than 50,000 healthcare workers, including homecare workers; personal care attendants in assisted living and residential care facilities; certified nursing assistants (CNAs) in nursing homes and hospitals; medical assistants (MAs) in hospitals and clinics; phlebotomists; surgical techs, ER techs, pharmacy techs, and radiologic techs in hospitals; respiratory therapists and physical therapists in hospitals; environmental and dietary services workers in hospitals; dental assistants; and workers in the Oregon State Hospital. Healthcare workers represented by SEIU are among the lower paid workers in the healthcare sector, and SEIU members in healthcare are more likely to be people of color.

The COVID pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for our healthcare workers, many of whom have shown up to work to serve their communities and to continue to earn a paycheck throughout the last two years despite deep fears and frustrations. Chronic staffing shortages in healthcare, especially in hospitals and long term care settings, were common prior to COVID, but the pandemic has dramatically exacerbated these shortages and the challenges workers face providing quality patient and resident care. Chronic staffing shortages increase worker injuries, increase worker turnover, and degrade patient and resident quality outcomes. In Oregon, employment data show that the state had just seven unemployed people for every ten job openings, and with 28,000 vacancies healthcare as a sector had the largest number of job

openings according to the most recent data.¹ In short, our healthcare workers need relief and they need it now.

In addition, the healthcare workers we represent are part of the future of Oregon's healthcare workforce. Recruitment of new workers to fill vacancies is critical, and we should recruit both youth who are just entering the workforce and adults working in a non-healthcare field. However, we should also provide opportunities for advancement for existing healthcare workers. People can train for homecare worker, personal care attendant, CNA, and MA jobs in relatively short periods of time, and as a result these training programs and jobs are more accessible for people who have experienced poverty or economic instability.² These workers already know what it means to take care of patients and residents; they are familiar with both the benefits and the challenges of this work. And, these workers are more likely to be people of color who will help meet the growing demands on the healthcare system to match the growing diversity in our state.

We support SB 1545 because it would enable statewide partnerships and initiatives and foster collaboration between educational institutions, healthcare providers, and healthcare workers to solve Oregon's healthcare workforce crisis. SB 1545 is grounded in racial justice and will center new and innovative workforce development approaches that will reach communities that have previously been systematically excluded from our healthcare workforce development efforts.

Specifically, SB 1545 invests in the following strategies that will support the healthcare sector and healthcare workers:

- Competitive statewide grants.
- Expanding apprenticeship opportunities.
- Developing models for credit for prior learning, which will allow students to build on their previous experiences and education in seeking new certification or licensure.
- Providing wraparound services like childcare and other crucial supports.

¹ "Oregon has more open jobs than unemployed people, exacerbating hiring squeeze." *The Oregonian*. January 19, 2022.

<https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2022/01/oregon-has-more-open-jobs-than-unemployed-people-exacerbating-hiring-squeeze.html>

² "When 'anything could happen,' students opt for shorter programs: A new working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that disadvantaged students often opt for shorter programs because they expect life events will derail their pursuit of a four-year degree." *Work Shift*.

https://workshift.opencampusmedia.org/when-anything-could-happen-students-opt-for-shorter-programs/?utm_campaign=The%20Job&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revue%20newsletter

We urge you to move SB 1545 to the Joint Committee on Ways & Means with a do pass recommendation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony about this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Felisa Hagins
Political Director
SEIU Local 49

Courtney Graham
Political Director
SEIU Local 503