Testimony in Support of House Bill 4004
February 3, 2022
House Committee on Behavioral Health
Russell Lum

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Moore-Green and Reynolds, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity enter testimony on HB 4004. My name is Russell Lum, I am a political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association. We represent 15,000 nurses — including RNs and advanced practice nurses — and allied health workers. I share with you today that Oregon Nurses Association and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon urge passage of HB 4004, to boost staffing and retention in behavioral health.

Oregon Nurses Association knows how important a well-functioning behavioral health care landscape is to overall health. We all are aware Oregon's consistently low-scoring performance in behavioral health does real harm. Together, with policy implements such as those proposed with HB 4004, we must interrupt our state's trend of failing our vulnerable community members who use substances, or who are in crisis, or who are seeking mental health care.

Overwhelmingly most of our members are not in behavioral health by occupation, but behavioral health is thrust on their existing workloads, as members of the public with these illnesses and struggles crowd, for instance, emergency departments. This is due to long-running, systemic problems, which are never okay for a health care system, but which in a health care system under the strain and volatility of COVID-19 make for a unique disaster. Care across our system, for it not to fail patients and staff, must be strong inside the multitude of sectors and settings — acute, subacute, all of it.

For this reason — and to see Oregon attain healthy communities that are highly resourced and equitable and meeting the needs of the vulnerable — we support HB 4004. Oregon's behavioral health investments should expand, should attract new staff and practitioners, should retain the present workforce, and should be worker- (and of course patient-) centered. Dollars for behavioral health that are 75% marked for staff compensation, and the remainder for other recruitment or retention, is a commendable pro-workforce approach. Also commendable is the fact of these benefits reaching non-credentialed staff, support staff, in the sector.

ONA hopes the current session of the legislature makes numerous workforce investments, knowing how badly they are needed, and behavioral health is pivotal among them. Please join us with your support of House Bill 4004.