

Memorandum

To: Chair Prusak, Vice Chair Salinas, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the House Committee on Health Care



From: Marty Carty, Government Affairs Director, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: February 7, 2022

Re: Support HB 4003

The Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) is a non-profit organization with a mission to support Oregon's 34 community health centers, also known as federally qualified health centers, in leading the transformation of primary care to achieve health equity for all. Health centers deliver integrated primary, oral and behavioral health care services to over **466,000 Oregonians of which 40% identify as a racial or ethnic minority**. Community health centers are providers within the CCO networks, providing care to some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations, including **one in six Oregon Health Plan members**.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the chronic shortage of health care workers – namely nurses into policy conversations across the world. The shortage of caregivers from hospitals to primary care clinics is staggering and experts tell us the gap will continue to grow. There isn't any one component of the health care delivery system that can sustain a chronic shortage of nurses. The interconnectedness of our system of care means that if any one sector of the system is understaffed, both the public and outcomes suffer.

The policy solutions brought forward in HB 4003 are the right steps to increase the number of nurses available to meet today's need, grow the pipeline of nurses for tomorrow, and support our caregivers. We strongly support the three tenets of this important policy.

- Creating a nurse internship license will bring qualified student nurses into the workforce to perform specific duties and increase capacity in our health care delivery system. Additionally, allowing students to earn clinical hours while working will close the nurse workforce gap.
- Hiring nurses from out-of-state to fill temporary vacancies is one way community health centers are able bridge the workforce gap. Unfortunately, due to the shortage of health care workers it is often necessary for these non-resident nurses to extend their contracts because of a scarcity of available nurses to fill staff roles. Increasing the temporary license for a non-resident nurse to practice in Oregon from 30 to 90-days will allow these contracted nurses to remain working in cases where a delay in receiving a state license is delayed.
- The pandemic has stressed our health care workforce beyond their breaking point. We believe it is critical that we prioritize the health and well-being of our nurses. HB 4003 does this by including nurses in the Oregon Wellness Program – giving Oregon's 70,000 nurses direct access to counselling services with a professional who is trained to support their health care colleagues.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 4003. **We respectfully urge you to vote yes in support of HB 4003 as one tool to support Oregon's nurses.**