



Testimony in Support of House Bill 4126

February 7, 2022

House Committee on Business and Labor

Russell Lum

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. 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'm joining today to express Oregon Nurses Association and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon's support for House Bill 4126 for labor harmony in behavioral health.

The labor harmony policy before you specifies that in order to get a state contract, an organization will sit down with the union and together produce terms reflecting a process for resolution of disputes *and* no interruption of the services the workers provide for the life of the contract. If there is no union in such case at the time the State is contracting out the services, the organization attests to producing those conditions when or if a union requests to represent those workers.

To be clear, ONA's union members are not in the sector covered by the bill. The bill stands to affect behavioral health and addiction, where the employer is a private, community-based provider (seeking a state contract). It's of priority to our members because of the importance of the behavioral health sector to overall the health system, as well as justice for fellow health workers who may be seeing state dollars applied against them as they try to exercise their rights to bargain collectively. The gain for workers here is evident, and we support these principles — these fellow health workers are trying to use their legal and rightful means to impact their pay and working conditions. And all the more urgent is their cause *today*, when behavioral health pay trails other pay growth, and there is an understaffing crisis in which lack of good pay and lack of voice on the job have major contributing roles.

As to why behavioral health should be of concern to anyone working on and working in our health system overall, the links are clear. ONA's hospital nurses are not only overwhelmed by COVID-19 but by our system's gaps in caring for mental health patients and those with substance use disorders. Behavioral health is stretched to be delivered in the wrong setting and burdens our members' existing workloads, as members of the public with these struggles and illnesses crowd emergency departments.

We can do better by everyone in this scenario. Patients, hospital workers, and community-based organization workers — everyone can deal with much less crisis if smart commitments in law are made. We believe this labor harmony approach is one such commitment, and urge that you join us in support of House Bill 4126.