

February 17, 2023

The Honorable Rob Nosse
Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health & Health Care

Delivered electronically via OLIS

RE: Support for health care workforce development initiatives

Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics is a non-profit organization with facilities that include Salem Hospital, West Valley Hospital in Dallas, and Salem Health Medical Group primary and specialty clinics spread throughout the mid-Willamette Valley. Salem Health serves patients in Marion and Polk, as well as Benton, Lincoln, and Yamhill counties with acute care, urgent care, primary, and specialty care.

These are incredibly challenging times for Oregon's health care system. Several root problems are driving these issues, including a national labor shortage that is impacting Oregon. Over the last year, we've been forced to rely on hundreds of contract staff to maintain access to critical capacity and protect safe staffing levels. Contract staff are a necessary measure to protect care in our community, but are merely a stop-gap measure and not a sustainable solution.

We are laser focused on recruiting and retaining skilled caregivers. Last year Salem Health hired over 1,000 staff, yet we began 2023 with over 600 openings. Many of those jobs are for nurses, CNAs, technicians, and other critical care givers. These labor shortages are not isolated to one part of the system. Providers throughout the continuum of care are struggling to hire staff. The fact that many patients are, even today, boarding in our hospital for lack of step-down care is evidence of the devastating shortage health care staff in Oregon.

It is with this in mind that I write in support of legislation that strengthens Oregon's health care workforce, like HB 2977, HB 2651, HB 2652, HB 2773, and HB 2928.

The shortage of healthcare workers has been long predicted as a by-product of the country's age demographics. The pandemic has accelerated that shortage, and Oregon must be creative as it builds and attracts a workforce for the future. Incentives to attract new caregivers and support existing students, faculty, and nurses will help Oregon build the health care workforce that our communities need. These initiatives will take resources, time and coordination between health care providers, academic institutions, and state government. No one organization can solve this problem alone.

Having sufficient numbers of health care professionals to meet the needs of Oregonians now and into the future is critical. I thank you for taking on the hard work of crafting policy to address our current health care workforce issue. Salem Health seeks opportunities to continue being an active, solution-oriented partner with you.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Nester Wolfe, RN
President & CEO