

February 24, 2023

TO: Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

From: Rev. Dr. David L. Wheeler

SUPPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 2697

My name is Dr. David Wheeler, and I represent the Faith/Labor Committee of Portland Jobs with Justice.

As the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Portland for a number of years, and currently as a professor of ethics training new and continuing church leaders, I have spent many days and hours in hospitals visiting church members, interacting with nurses and other health care professionals, and listening to the experiences of others – clergy, patients and front-line care providers themselves.

I have also had a great deal of experience with church members and their home health care providers. These dedicated providers are often invisible beyond the homes in which they serve, and therefore vastly underappreciated.

Especially during the depths of the COVID crisis – a crisis which is still not entirely behind us – nurses and other care providers were hailed as heroes. But the erosion of staffing levels, the stagnation of wages and benefits, and the subjection of these “heroes” to chronic overwork and fatigue in medical facilities tells a different story.

Understaffing is *dangerous* to patients and providers alike, and is demoralizing to all involved. HB 2697 is a good faith effort to address the concerns of nurses, technical staff and other professional staff in hospitals, and those providing home health care services. It will support the role of the Oregon Health Authority in enforcing staffing standards.

I, personally, and my colleagues on the Faith/Labor Committee strongly urge you to move forward with HB 2697. It is comprehensive, practical and – in the language of faith – righteous.