

TO: Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee

FROM: Brent Wilder
Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities

DATE: March 2, 2023

RE: Concerns with SB 523

At the legislature, in rulemaking and in its own practices, the Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities (The Alliance) has continued to advocate for new pathways for students to earn higher education degrees.

Regarding Senate Bill 523, which proposes to permit Oregon's Community Colleges to offer a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN), **The Alliance and the nursing deans at our member institutions believe it does nothing to address the nursing shortage in Oregon, and could potentially exacerbate the existing nursing faculty shortage.** The concerns raised include:

- **Clinical space and finding qualified faculty are the main obstacles** in community colleges conferring BSN degrees, not program capacity or geography (most BSN completion programs are available online).
- **The wage gap and nursing faculty retention.** According to the [Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative's \(OLDC\) "Addressing the Nursing Shortage in Oregon" draft report](#), when examining the faculty/retention issue, the wage gap between nursing faculty and a nurse practitioner, both of whom require a graduate degree, results in faculty earning \$49,000 less per year. Even more concerning, faculty earn approximately \$10,000 less per year than registered nurses in practice with an associates or baccalaureate degree. Further, states with a higher nursing faculty salary gap graduate fewer students per capita.
- The level of accreditation a community college would need to attain to confer a BSN is a significant additional cost to programs that are not already accredited.

The inability to accept more students in current programs is attributed to a lack of nursing faculty and clinical placements, not to the ability for ADNs to attain a BSN. There are many existing programs worth building upon that would do more to address the lack of qualified nurses than allowing community colleges to confer BSN degrees:

- The Oregon Consortium of Nursing Education (OCNE) is a statewide partnership of Oregon nursing programs involving eleven community colleges, OHSU's five regional campuses, and OHSU's RNBS online completion program. [OHSU received a \\$45 million investment from the legislature in 2022 to fund its 30-30-30 plan](#) to help address the state's urgent healthcare workforce needs, allowing OHSU to expand class sizes, graduate additional and more diverse health care professionals, such as nurses through OCNE.
- The Schools of Nursing at several Alliance member institutions maintain articulation agreements with various community college programs and provide an affordable pathway to earning a BSN. These programs have room to accept more students.

- Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) graduates have a plethora of flexible and affordable options for RN to BSN programs, not only in Oregon, but through accredited online programs across the country. Oregon does not need more RN to BSN programs. This only potentiates the faculty shortage issue for prelicensure needs.

In 2022, the legislature passed House Bill 4003, directing the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to create the [Nursing Workforce Study](#). This study, funded by the legislature, provides an extensive, data-driven analysis of the nursing workforce issues we currently face, as well as excellent conclusions.

The culminating recommendations of that study provide a clear strategy for addressing the issues, and **none of those recommendations include community colleges conferring a BSN degree**. If we are going to strategically address our nursing workforce challenges, we need to follow the recommendations of the report the legislature has already commissioned. Putting limited resources toward initiatives that are not deemed to solve the problem are simply not a prudent use of public funds.

Finally, our goal of increasing students graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing aligns with the state. We see nursing as an area where transfer pathways and continued partnering between community colleges and four-year universities is successfully working throughout the state and look forward to continued work with stakeholders to address the barriers needed to close the gap in Oregon's nursing workforce demand.