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RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Alisha Akita and I am a nurse at OHSU with nearly 20 years experience in Labor and Delivery. Mothers and babies depend on and are transferred to us from all over the state as we are a high risk OB unit. I am at a breaking point where I see no other option than to leave the profession I so dearly respect. The sense of hopelessness that I feel is overwhelmingly at times. Time and time again our hospital puts profit before patients. My particular unit has provided real-time data to our hospital management about how we need adequate staffing to provide the standards of care recommended by our professional organization AWHONN. Disappointingly, there has been little change to improve conditions for truly putting patient safety first.

I was the Charge RN for one of my shifts which entails orchestrating multiple healthcare providers from multiple disciplines while trying to facilitate adequate staffing for patient care. It is a full time job that in no way allows the ability to take on a patient assignment on top of charge RN duties but that is exactly where I found myself. Because there were physically not enough nurses that morning for the number of patients we had, I was faced with the worry that I would miss something and be putting my license on the line because I was spread so thin. Unfortunately, this is not a one time occurrence.

Hospitals in Oregon must be held accountable for repeatedly ignoring the pleas of nurses to adequately staff units to safely take care of patients. We have sacrificed ourselves far too long and the pandemic is no longer the excuse we want to hear.

We need more staff.

THIS IS NOT NEW NEWS!!

20 plus years ago in nursing school we were doing presentations on this very subject.

Safe staffing ratios are directly correlated with less medical errors. Would you want your loved one to be cared for by a nurse that was being stretched thin? We're human and it's easy to miss the little things when we've got a lot on our plate. Little things add up to big things QUICKLY with our critically ill patients. Being one of the most profitable critical access hospitals in Oregon, my hospital should be putting our patients before profits. It's the moral and humane thing to do. Our community deserves better. Oregon's nurses deserve better, and our patients deserve more staff.

Please support HB 2697 and give nurses what they really need: help.

The work environment for nurses at my hospital is extremely troubling. Not only are we regularly understaffed, on almost every single shift, we frequently do not have enough staff to ensure we get our legally required breaks. Working long shifts of 12 hours or more, without a break or a lunch, is exhausting and, quite frankly, dangerous for both nurses and patients.

We are burning out at a record pace.

We all know that Oregon had a staffing shortage long before the pandemic. Yes, the COVID 19 pandemic has made already existing staffing issues worse, and Oregon is now facing a full-blown crisis as countless overworked and undervalued healthcare workers leave the bedside in search of safer working conditions, better pay, or simply leaving their profession entirely. Nurses and other health care workers have been asking hospital executives and managers for help for more than a decade, and we have not gotten it. HB 2697 seeks to address many of the root causes of this crisis including requiring minimum safe nurse staffing and enforcement of legally required rest and meal breaks. The problem in Oregon is not that we don't have enough nurses. The problem is we don't have enough nurses who are willing to work in these conditions. Please, help nurses and our patients by passing HB 2697.

Sincerely yours,

Alisha Akita, RN