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Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Amy Nickerson and I am a nurse at Bay Area Hospital in the Emergency Department.

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,

Amy Nickerson, BSN, RN