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RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Zoë Haight and I am a nurse at OHSU Hospital on the Mother Baby Unit.

Management at OHSU and other Oregon hospitals praise nurses as being “heroes”, yet time and time again, ignore our repeated pleas for safer staffing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, instead of listening to our concerns of unsafe staffing levels and burnout amongst nurses throughout the hospital, and acknowledging and addressing the ongoing staffing crisis, OHSU “rewarded” us with a small pin for our hard work. It’s not surprising that so many nurses have left OHSU and other hospitals since the pandemic. These last few years have been extremely difficult for nurses and we need help. We need more staff.

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 things when we are overwhelmed with too heavy of a workload and not enough help. There have been many shifts I have experienced and have seen other nurses experience where we have to skip our breaks and/or stay late because of a high-risk medical patient becoming unstable and needing emergent care. Patients are becoming more and more sick, which means our workload is becoming more challenging, especially with inadequate staffing levels. If we had safer and appropriate staffing levels, our mental health and rates of burnout would be significantly reduced, workplace satisfaction and nurse retention would increase, and patients would have higher quality of care, and safer and more satisfying hospital experiences.

Hospitals should be putting their nurses and patients before profits. It’s the moral and humane thing to do. Our community deserves better. Oregon’s nurse 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 concerning. 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. I constantly receive text messages (usually daily or multiple times a day) from our charge nurses desperately asking for more nurses to come in to work on our day off because we are understaffed. We work long shifts of 12 hours or more, usually never getting the full amount of required breaks and lunch. It is exhausting and dangerous for both nurses and patients. Every shift I work I hear nurses express how upset and

unsatisfied they are about their current working conditions. They talk about how overwhelmed they are, how hungry they are, how they are just now finally sitting down to have a break after already working 5 hours, and how stressed out they are because their patients are very sick and they have a heavy assignment. I myself experience these things regularly too. In addition, there are many shifts during which we don't have an extra nurse on the unit to help us when multiple patients call out at the same time with requests or needs, we don't have nutrition staff to deliver our patients their meals, and phlebotomy is short staffed for the first 5 hours of the shift. This all ends up falling on the nurses, who have to take on these extra tasks on top of an already highly demanding workload. We as nurses are burning out at a record pace. We have all heard the safety instructions before a flight, that it is important to always put your own oxygen mask on first before putting on someone else's, well this analogy applies to nurses and their patients. How can nurses provide the best and safest care for their patients when they are not getting their basic needs for safety met first? This means having enough staffing; this means getting all of our legally required breaks and lunch so we are able to eat enough and care for ourselves at the bare minimum.

We all know that Oregon had a staffing shortage long before the pandemic. 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,

Zoë Haight