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February 26, 2023,

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care:

My name is Joy Stahl, and I am a nurse at Oregon Health and Science University in the Adult Acute Care Medicine unit. I am writing today in support of HB 2697 after a long 12-hour shift as the charge nurse on my unit in which we worked short a RN and a CNA. I have worked there for the past 27 years. I love bedside nursing, taking care of patients and helping our staff members. As much as I have loved my job over many years, I find myself stepping away from it more due to the stress of working short staffed and without breaks on a regular basis.

Today I watched our staff jump up and hustle to every bed alarm that went off, answer call lights and ventilator alarms, and tried their best to take care of multiple patients with too few staff members. We do not have break nurses. We have a buddy system that requires a nurse to be responsible for 6-8 patients for a coworker to get a break. As the charge nurse I strive to help ensure that our RN's, CNAs, and Health Unit Coordinators get a lunch break. Today I sat down for a quick break, but the bathroom emergency alarm went unanswered for a minute, so I knew my coworkers had to be too busy to get there – I responded for the patient. Another patient needed assistance to have something to drink – I responded so their nurse could get a break. Nurses constantly respond to their patients because it is our calling. We do not want care to be delayed and needs not met. But that comes at a sacrifice to our health and well-being. Putting patients first at all costs is what we do and what we have done. But it does not have to be that way. Safe staffing ratios would help us get more staff and the break coverage we need to care for our patients and ourselves.

I have participated in the past on our Unit Based Nursing Practice Committee. We have created staffing plans, surveyed staff, collected data and created algorithms to show how we could better care for our patients. For years we have struggled to keep within our budgeted HPPD with the number of staff needed. While we continue to pursue every opportunity to increase staffing and break coverage, we have not succeeded. We need your help.

My nursing career has provided me with some of the most rewarding experiences of my life and some of the hardest of days. Every patient and staff thank you or written note reminds me of why I became a nurse. I started in 1995 taking care of AIDS patients by rushing them to the ICU with PC pneumonia or during end-of-life care. I have watched Cystic Fibrosis children pass away way too young. And most recently have worked through the Covid pandemic doing some of my most rewarding work with vaccines and Covid therapy and the most difficult taking care of previously healthy adults struggling on ventilators with Covid. I have seen nurses come together and succeed in making things better for their patients. We need to continue to do this with safe staffing ratios.

Please, help nurses and our patients by passing HB 2697.

Sincerely,

*Joy Stahl*

Joy Stahl, RN, CMSRN