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RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Erica Larsen and I am a nurse at Oregon Health and Sciences University at the Knight Cancer Institute.

After spending over 10 years at OHSU Doernbecher Children's Hospital as a floor nurse on the hem/onc/BMT unit, I finally left in October 2022. I loved my job on 10S. It was always an honor to care for families during what is, most likely, one of the most challenging experiences for any family to face. Unfortunately, because of the lack of support and transparency over the past 2 ½ years from management and administrators, I felt that I needed to leave the unit. I no longer felt like I was afforded the time necessary to both care for the medical needs of my patient and provide the holistic family centered care that is always the goal of the hospital. Instead, my job had become completely task oriented. As more experienced nurses continued to leave the unit, newer nurses were hired to fill in the spots. Hematology/ oncology/BMT is a very specialized area of nursing and requires specialized knowledge that takes years to acquire. Children going through cancer treatment, including BMT, can be very acutely ill. Identifying subtle signs and symptoms that could be indicative of the deterioration of a patient is also a skill that comes with time on the floor and time spent with more experienced nurses. Management was not willing to staff up to help with the less experienced nurses. At times, it felt like I just needed to get through the shift and hope that no patient was injured during the shift.

In my new position as a nurse navigator, our work is not prioritized the same as floor or clinic nursing. As a result, filling or creating the additional positions we need is almost at a complete standstill. The navigation team has very little coverage. So, trying to allow for vacations is a bit like a less fun game of Tetris. Although we are legally guaranteed vacation time, few of us are able to get all the time we would like to have off. Without time off, burnout continues.

Management at hospitals across Oregon have shared dozens of messages praising nurses as "heroes," while, at the same time, ignoring our repeated pleas for assistance. To be frank, these last few years have been extremely difficult for nurses. We don't care about being called heroes; we want 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 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 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 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. 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.

Take good care,
Erica Larsen