

My name is Emily Krug and I am an Intensive Care nurse at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland. I am writing in support of HB 2679.

I believe that safe staffing is essential to the retention of highly skilled and experienced nurses, and to the safety and dignity of patients. Hospitals remain unwilling to take the steps needed to ensure adequate staffing. It is the duty of the legislature to step in to set and enforce nurse to patient ratios.

I became a nurse because I believe in service to my community. I knew going in that this career would be challenging physically, mentally, and emotionally. It has been very demanding in all of these ways. I continued to work through the pandemic, putting myself and my family at risk. I regularly take care of some of the sickest patients in the state.

Every year our patient populations becomes sicker, requiring more dynamic care from our team of health care professionals. Nurses across the state have been asked to do more with less. I believe that we, as nurses, have proven our commitment to our patients and community with our actions. We show up everyday despite the risks to ourselves, we work very hard, and when faced with adversity we take action to ensure that our patients get the care they need and deserve. However, we are reaching our breaking point. Thousands of nurses have already left the profession with many more likely to follow. Burnout is the result of systemic failure, not because we don't try hard enough or do enough self-care.

I need to work for a system that supports me by providing adequate safe staffing. Often our patients are so sick that it isn't safe for us to step away even for a moment, much less to take our legally required breaks. ICUs use the 'buddy system' meaning that in order for me to get a break, another nurse has to care for my critically ill patients in addition to their own. I regularly work a full shift (12.5 hours) without the opportunity to eat a meal or use the restroom. During the past year I have seen nurses struggle to address several critical incidents simultaneously without adequate backup. Patients simply cannot "wait their turn" when they are suffering catastrophic injury or illness.

I am worried about the future of nursing in a system that prioritizes profits over people. The moral injury and burnout caused by inadequate staffing drives experienced nurses out of the profession and discourages students from pursuing nursing as a career. If more is not done to improve working conditions and bring staffing up to a safe level, the hospital system is headed for disaster.

Remember: there is a good chance that you or someone you love will need intensive care nursing in the future. On the worst day of your life, who will be there to take care of you?