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On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB523

By allowing the HECC to authorize BSN degrees at community colleges that have met all the relevant requirements it would provide better, more equitable opportunities for students. A community college option for earning a BSN degree would increase access to 4-year nursing degrees across Oregon and particularly in rural areas. A student with a BSN (as opposed to an RN) has more opportunities for promotion and higher pay. Today, many community college RN graduates are pursuing expensive options to attain a BSN. Local community college alternatives would provide a lower cost. If community college(s) were able to offer the BSN, it would provide a valuable local option to RN graduates who are not pursuing the BSN to continue their education with familiar faculty, learning environments, student supports and – critically – a more affordable career pathway than currently exists. An RN to BSN program from a community college will provide the opportunity for more equitable outcomes for underserved, often marginalized populations, as education from community colleges is a more accessible, affordable option.

Additionally this would address local healthcare workforce needs as a community college BSN helps address the nursing shortage by giving more students the credential they need (a BSN) to continue on to a Masters degree (MSN), which is required to teach at the RN level. A shortage of nursing educators is one of the key chokepoints in the postsecondary nursing pipeline. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) Future of Nursing Initiative has recommended that organizations like hospitals should strive to achieve 80% BSN prepared nurses by 2020. Currently only 61-62% of Oregon nurses are educated at the BSN level or higher. In rural areas, where there are well-documented so-called “health care deserts,” having a viable local and affordable option for nursing students to obtain credentials and educationally advance is critical to meeting health care needs.

Furthermore, community colleges have the capacity to offer the RN to BSN. Sixteen out of 17 Oregon Community colleges currently offer 2-year Associate Degrees in Nursing (ADN) with a very successful track record for students. Successful completion of the Registered Nurse (RN) certification exam in 2021 is 85.8% for ADN programs statewide compared to 86.4% for BSN programs. Linn-Benton's NCLEX pass rate is currently 100%. Most of the bedside training in a hospital or other setting takes place in the first two years for the RN degree. In fact, an RN to BSN program does not require clinical training. All nursing programs that result in RN licensure require master’s prepared nurse educators, which means that community college nursing faculty already have the credentials necessary to teach to the BSN.

