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David A. Cauble
President & CEO

February 14, 2023

Senate President Rob Wagner
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
900 Court St. NE, S-201
Salem, Oregon 97301
Sen.RobWagner@oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Senate President Wagner,

I am writing on behalf of Sky Lakes Medical Center to express our support for Senate Bill 523 relating to amending ORS 341.013 and 348.910 that would require applied baccalaureate degrees in nursing to be conferred as a "Bachelor of Science in Nursing."

In 2019, SB3 gave community colleges the ability to offer applied baccalaureate (BAS) degrees if authorized by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). The ability of community colleges to confer a baccalaureate degree was an important first step, but additional changes are needed to afford the greatest benefit to the students pursuing the higher education opportunity this change has provided. The BAS-N degree is not recognized by the three nursing program accrediting bodies, nor is it recognized by employers and nursing boards. Community colleges need the ability to confer the industry and regulatory recognized title of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN).

Rural health systems like Sky Lakes Medical Center rely heavily on the community colleges to help supply a significant portion of our nursing staff. In the past 12 months we have recruited 16 new graduate registered nurses, 50% of which are beginning employment as Associate Degree Nurses (ADN). The ability to recruit and retain ADN staff is imperative to the survival of rural health. As the number of ADN staff in our organization continues to grow the opportunities to grow both professionally and personally are critical to retaining staff. Sky Lakes encourages staff to continue their education and pursue a bachelor's degrees as well as graduate level education. Over the past year, 10 Nurse Practitioners, that began their careers in RN positions at Sky Lakes, have completed their graduate level education and will continue serving the community in this new role. Career development made possible through additional education is an important retention and recruitment strategy that is essential to our ability to serve the many health needs of our community. A local option to pursue a BSN offers students in our community the opportunity to continue working while attending classes in an environment that is familiar to the students, easily accessible and at a cost significantly below other programs.

Poverty is a significant challenge for many living in our community. Education, made possible through a community college, provides a pathway out of poverty and toward financial



independence. A BSN degree opens the door even wider for those interested in pursuing further career advancement opportunities or graduate level training. The BAS-N is a degree option that offers none of the growth potential for those in our community that are seeking an equitable path to a better future.

The nursing shortage in Oregon and across the country shows no signs of abating any time soon. A community college option for earning a BSN degree would increase access to bachelor's level nursing degrees across Oregon and particularly in rural areas. Currently all the nursing programs in the state cannot meet the statewide demand for new nurse graduates. The addition of BSN programs at the community college level will benefit the health systems in the state by increasing the pool of qualified nurses and most importantly provide additional education opportunities for students seeking better pay and advancement made possible with a BSN.

The health systems across our state and in particular rural areas are continually searching for new solutions and ways to improve the health of our communities. As access to qualified medical providers grows more challenging the role for advance practice providers is increasingly important. The education process for an advance practice nurse is long and challenging and cannot be achieved without a BSN. Removing barriers to higher education and supporting the development of those living in our communities that choose to pursue advanced clinical degrees is vital to our ability to care for our communities. Again, a BSN degree obtained through a community college opens the door to a better future for students and our community.

Rural communities face many challenges, and we are grateful for our partners in higher education here in Klamath County that include, Oregon Tech, OHSU and KCC. These institutions work tirelessly to educate and train staff for positions in all areas of our health system, and we cannot meet the needs of our community without their support. Working together we are striving to meet the demands of our region and create opportunities for the people we serve to thrive and succeed. The opportunity for community colleges to confer a BSN degree will deliver significant benefits to our state and I urge you to sign on to SB523 and support the opportunity for more students to obtain their dream of higher education and all the benefits associated with that achievement.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David A. Cauble".

David A. Cauble
President and CEO

cc: Senate President Rob Wagner
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senator Suzanne Weber, Vice-Chair
Senator Dick Anderson
Senator Lew Frederick
Senator Sara Gelsner Blouin
Senator Art Robinson