

Feb. 28, 2023

The Honorable Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

Delivered electronically via OLIS

Chair Dembrow, Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Sarah Horn. I am the Chief Nursing Officer for Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics.

Salem Health is a non-profit organization with facilities that include Salem Hospital, West Valley Hospital in Dallas, and Salem Health Medical Group primary and specialty clinics spread throughout the mid-Willamette Valley. Salem Health serves patients in Marion and Polk, as well as Benton, Lincoln, and Yamhill counties.

Prior to the pandemic, Salem Health could pick from among multiple applicants for each nursing job. Now, the tables have turned. Though we hired over 1,000 new employees in 2022, we started 2023 with over 600 openings – about 75% of which were for nurses. As a Magnet hospital, Salem Hospital places a special priority on Bachelor of Science: Nursing degrees, and supports our nurses personal, professionally, and financially to earn their BSN. For years, Oregon has not produced enough nurse graduates to meet the needs of our state. As our population is aging and has more complex needs, expanding the number of educational opportunities for future care-givers is the most important thing we can do to grow the health care workforce and meet the needs of our communities.

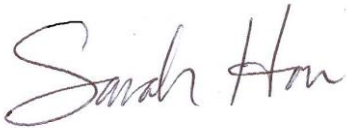
A community college option for earning a BSN degree would increase access to four-year nursing degrees across Oregon, and particularly in rural areas. There are more prospective nursing students in Oregon than there are available class spots. Students today are competing for limited spots, and many are forced to rely on expensive out-of-state programs or wait to be selected in future class lotteries. Community college BSN options would create low-cost alternatives and additional pathways to a nursing career.

An RN-to-BSN program from a community college will also provide the opportunity for more equitable outcomes for underserved, often marginalized populations, as education from community colleges is a more accessible, affordable option. At Chemeketa Community College, 100 out of 175 nursing graduates over the last five years did not go on to earn a BSN. If community colleges were able to offer the BSN, it would provide a valuable local option to RN graduates who are not currently pursuing the BSN to continue their education with familiar faculty, learning environments, student supports and - critically - a more affordable and accessible career pathway than currently exists.

That's why Salem Health supports Senate Bill 523. This bill would expand our nursing workforce by allowing community colleges to confer four-year BSN degrees. We already have a robust partnership with Chemeketa Community College. We are eager to expand that partnership to *build a stronger pipeline of nurses from Oregon to work in Oregon*. To that end, we have committed to providing clinical placements for students from Chemeketa's program, should this bill pass

I'm grateful, Chair Dembrow, that you and your colleagues brought this bill forward. I urge your support for SB 523. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,



Sarah Horn, MBA, BSN, RN, NE-BC, RNC-LRN
Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing & Clinical Operations Officer