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On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

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I have been an RN in the state of Oregon for 10 years now, and the biggest challenge that faces hospital staff on a daily basis is being short staffed. As with any industry having fewer staff to do the work creates more work for those that are there. However in an acute care hospital fewer staff means fewer eyes to see subtle changes in a patients condition, and fewer hands to help when the patients condition further declines. Nurses see the effects of short staffing and the impact that it has on patients and families first hand. The more patients a nurse has under their care means there is less time per patient to attend to their individualized care needs, less time to assess changes that maybe occurring, and creating more of a risk for hospitalized Oregonians. It is imperative that safe staffing standards be implemented in the state of Oregon at all levels of care including RN's, CNA's and techs and in all units (ICU, medical-surgical, telemetry etc.).

Breaks and meal times are another huge concern that falls under this umbrella of safe staffing standards. Many hospitals rely on the "break buddy" system for a nurse to be able to step away and get a break. A break buddy is when another RN on the floor watches your patients while you take a break. This means that if nurse A is caring for 4 patients and nurse B goes on lunch then nurse A is now taking care of 8 patients, and there is one less RN on the unit. Due to this flawed system of getting staff breaks often times nurses will forego their lunch or 15 minute break to ensure the safety of their patients or perform tasks that must be completed in a timely manner. This leads not only to fatigue in the moment for staff, but another safety risk for the patients.

It's true that many nurses are leaving the bedside, the daily stress and fatigue from the lack of adequate staff and the inability to ensure all staff get meal and break periods are contributing to the burnout and turnover the nursing profession is experiencing. Through stricter staffing guidelines you can provide a safer healthcare system for all Oregonians, as well as safer workplaces for the healthcare team.