

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of House Bill 2697

February 28, 2023

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin,

For the record, I am Travis Nelson – the State Representative for House District 44 and I am a Registered Nurse. Over the course of my 19-year career, I’ve served the nursing profession at the state and national level and have worked as an ER nurse, a critical care nurse, a case manager, an employee health nurse, a nursing home RN, a skilled nursing nurse, the charge nurse on an in-patient rehab unit, and I’ve worked as a union rep for nurses. Committee members, I am here today in support of House Bill 2697. This bill would provide much-needed relief not just for hospital nurses, but for all allied health care workers.

Health care workers are crying out for help! This evening, you will hear about the experiences of health care workers firsthand. About how they are often caring for far too many patients and how the stress from insufficient staffing levels has led to the physical and emotional exhaustion. And how this has led to far too many health care workers prematurely leaving the profession.

The vast majority of Oregon’s nurses have regularly reported that they have suffered moral injury, compassion fatigue, and are just not able to provide quality care due to unsafe staffing levels, impacts on their mental health, and physical exhaustion. The top reason cited for these feelings of stress, burnout, and being overwhelmed? Not having enough staff. I am someone who wanted to be an ER nurse until I received the training and started doing the work. Like so many other ER nurses I quit because of staffing-related burnout. Unfortunately, like too many health care workers I know what it is like to have a patient die on your watch, a patient with a spouse, a patient with children and family that loved them, only to know that that patient probably would have lived if I had had less patients and was able to catch the signs that they were in trouble sooner. According to Johns Hopkins, medical errors are the third leading cause of death in the United States and a study published by the New England Journal of Medicine in January of this year showed that 1 out of 4 hospitalized patients experience harmful events, many of which are related to insufficient staffing. Ask yourself, if your loved one had a stroke or a heart attack, would you want a health care team that hadn’t slept or wasn’t able to give your loved one attentive care? Would you want to have to question if the hospital did all they could to save your loved one if they died? I can tell you with certainty that there are things that I caught when I had a safe patient load that I might have missed if I would have had too many patients.

HB 2697 is not only needed, but critical. Oregon is facing a hospital staffing crisis and the heart of that crisis is turnover. This is a work environment crisis as much as it is a staffing crisis. Front-line health care workers are telling us that they will not, and should not, continue working under these conditions. Eighty percent of our state’s nurses have reported that their units are understaffed, and ninety-nine percent of nurses said that their units are sometimes or *never* staffed appropriately. Furthermore, there is a tremendous amount of interest in this legislation. I get asked about this bill more than anything else we are working on, second only to the Universal Healthcare governance board. And last I checked, about 270 pieces of written testimony had been submitted in support of HB 2697 with only 9 submissions in opposition.

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

I have heard stories from health care workers working 12- and 16-hour shifts with no opportunity for a bathroom break or to sit down for a meal break. And the data reflects these experiences – nearly seventy percent of our state’s nurses say they are experiencing *severe* burnout, with more than three-quarters of them reporting that their work lives are dangerously stressful.

House Bill 2697 addresses these concerns and issues, with common-sense provisions that will require a minimum number of staff on a specific unit in order to provide safe patient care and it will create accountability for failing to follow Oregon law. I believe that this bill is recruitment *and* retention legislation. It’s anecdotal, but I think that health care workers will come back to patient care and Oregon will attract nurses and health care workers from across the country if we show that we have their backs by creating safe workplace standards. Even the hospitals have acknowledged that staffing-related burnout is driving workers away. All Oregonians deserve access to the highest quality health care. I believe that this bill will save lives and make our hospitals safer. I also believe that Oregon’s health care workers deserve protection and support for their crucial, life-saving services. I urge you to pass HB 2697. Thank you.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Travis Nelson".

State Representative Travis Nelson
House District 44, North/NE Portland