



February 28th, 2023

To: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care
From: Liz Marquez Gutierrez, PCUN
Re: Support for HB 2697

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, Members of the Committee,

My name is Liz Marquez Gutierrez, I'm the policy associate at PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. At PCUN, we work to empower farmworkers and working Latinx families to improve their working conditions through community building, organizing, and policy advocacy.

I am submitting testimony on behalf of PCUN in support of HB 2697 which would be responsive to the health care workforce crisis, support overloaded health care workers, and improve patient safety and care in our community.

As farmworkers, our members understand what it means to work long hours and in often dangerous conditions which contribute to fatigue and sleep issues, the onset/progression of heat disease; stroke; diabetes; depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations; and increased risk of work-related injury¹. As patients, our members may often receive health care from nurses who are strained and demoralized by inability to respond to patient needs in a timely manner due to short staffing. Study after study shows that understaffing is associated with longer lengths of stay, higher mortality, higher infection, and readmission. Not one of us wishes to be the patient whose care is put at risk by the overtaxing of a hospital staff member, yet the far-reaching nature of the staffing crisis means it could be any of us.

Our members support HB 2697 as patients who receive care from health care workers and as workers in support of other workers who demand that their working conditions significantly improve.

In HB 2697, we especially look forward to these staffing regulations addressing the needs of workers on their breaks. All workers deserve their meals and breaks. Our members understand what it means to have unlawfully withheld lunch and rest breaks and still taking on heavy assignments. Health care, as with other sectors, should be a context where problems getting meals and breaks receive swift remedy, including in law where appropriate.

¹ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2022R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/35778>

Establishing nurse-to-patient standards as well as a voice to determine staffing for categories of staff beyond hospital nursing is the solution to our lack of health workers that the workers themselves demand. Health care system workers and professionals have put forth for the legislature's consideration these measures in HB 2697 to ensure their jobs are sustainable and so that we are retaining this workforce. Please join us community members, advocates, and workers in support of HB 2697.