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March 2, 2023

Senator Dembrow
Vice Chair Weber
Senate Committee on Education
Oregon Legislature
Salem, OR 97301

Good afternoon. Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber and members of the committee, for the record, my name is Susan Bakewell-Sachs and I have the honor of serving as Dean of the School of Nursing at Oregon Health and Science University.

Let me begin by saying that I'm grateful for this focus on baccalaureate and higher degrees for nurses. You likely know that patients in our hospitals are very sick. This high level of illness in hospitals requires well-educated registered nurses who have the knowledge, skills, and competence to clinically reason and save lives. Baccalaureate and higher degree preparation of nurses has been shown in multiple studies to improve patient outcomes.

OHSU is the state's public health care education university and has served for decades as a partner in Oregon's coordinated nursing education model that centers students and their pathway through nursing education. OHSU partners to offer BSN degrees on four physical public university campuses in Ashland, Klamath Falls, La Grande and Monmouth, and offers a statewide online RN/BS in nursing degree completion program. We are also a member of the Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education (OCNE) which is a partnership of 10 community colleges and five university campuses across Oregon plus the OHSU RN-to-BSN program. The consortium has supported a seamless associate to baccalaureate degree path for nursing students and faculty development for more than 20 years.

I'm here today to share OHSU's concern that SB 523 as written would move Oregon toward a model of nursing education that disincentivizes collaborative and streamlined approaches that benefit students.

OHSU understands better than most how badly hospitals and health care facilities need nurses right now. We are one of those impacted hospitals. We, like everyone else, are desperate to hire more nurses. Unfortunately, SB 523 is unlikely to add new nurses to Oregon's workforce. There is not currently a lack of spaces available in RN-to-BSN programs in Oregon and many programs are online providing existing options today for students to remain local.

As you have heard already, there is a real limitation in available slots in current community college RN programs and full BSN programs as a result of long-standing challenges in recruitment and retention of nurse faculty and limitations of local clinical education opportunities. OHSU supports



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legislation being considered in the House that aims to address these two issues directly, and we would stand in strong support of any proposals or investment requests community colleges might have of the legislature to help them grow the number of RN students they can graduate.

I strongly support baccalaureate and higher degrees for nurses. I oppose the approach of SB 523, however, because moving away from collaboration and coordination will reduce student mobility, isolate nurse faculty in individual programs, limit shared nurse faculty development and the opportunity to share faculty across programs, and fragment nursing education in Oregon. If the Legislature wants to create the option for more individual RN-to-BSN programs as laid out in SB 523, we would ask that you ensure the legislation requires common curriculum and seamless transfer among all public programs and that the cost to students remains low.

We understand that the Legislature has asked Oregon's public higher education institutions to streamline academic pathways for students through improved transferability and common course numbering. Nursing students should also maintain the benefit of a clear and easily transferrable pathway to their degree. This bill should therefore follow in the same direction the Legislature has set forth for higher education in streamlining academic programs for students, reducing duplication, and reducing the expense and time for students of lost credits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Bakewell-Sachs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan Bakewell-Sachs, PhD, RN, FAAN
Vice President for Nursing Affairs and Dean