



March 27, 2023

House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97302

Re: House Bill 3596
Delivered Electronically

Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and members of the committee:

The Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHS) is a mission-driven, nonprofit association representing Oregon's 62 community hospitals. Together, hospitals are the sixth largest private employer statewide, employing more than 70,000 employees. Committed to fostering a stronger, safer Oregon with equitable access to quality health care, OAHS provides services to Oregon's community hospitals ensuring all are able to deliver dependable, comprehensive health care to their communities; educates government officials and the public on the state's health landscape; and works collaboratively with policymakers, community organizations, and the health care community to build consensus on and advance health care policy benefiting the state's 4 million residents.

Hospitals are more than just buildings; they are cornerstones within the communities they serve. Our hospitals are employers, partners in community projects, and community spaces—all while providing vital health services to generation after generation of families in communities across Oregon. We know that when our hospitals are strong, our communities win.

OAHS strongly supports House Bill 3596, just as we supported HB 4106 (2022), which was intended to expand Oregon's apprenticeship programs to include surgical technologists and address some of the recruiting and retention challenges facing hospitals. House Bill 3596 is a technical fix to an unintentional word placement in House Bill 4106 that limited the state's ability to develop a workable apprenticeship program without also requiring a two-year degree before an apprenticeship could begin.

HB 3596 maintains the ability of the Oregon Health Authority and the Bureau of Labor and Industries to set clear standards for education and experience to certify a highly trained and skilled surgical technologist apprentice student, while also protecting patient safety. The bill reiterates clear Legislative intent, and will help address the shortage of available surgical technologists impacting patients, hospitals, and ambulatory surgery centers throughout the state.

There is a critical shortage of surgical technologists across the state, and our current training and certification options are not enough to fill the pipeline with qualified people. In a January 2020 survey distributed by the Oregon Ambulatory and Surgical Care Association (OASCA) and Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHS), hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers noted that it is very difficult to fill openings for surgical technologist and have anywhere between 1 and 20 unfilled positions currently.

HB 3596 will create an apprenticeship option to train community members looking to enter the health care profession and care for their neighbors in our hospitals and outpatient surgery centers around the state. Apprentices in a surgical technologist program will learn on the job, be eligible for certification while earning a paycheck, which will make the occupation an option for individuals who may otherwise not be able to afford the college tuition required now. This option will be particularly impactful in rural Oregon and was identified as the type of innovative workforce solutions the state needs post-pandemic Oregon's Workforce and Talent Development Board white paper on "Equitable Prosperity for All"¹.

Apprenticeship programs are valued for their focus on high quality on-the-job training and related instructional learning. Graduates in other occupations leave their programs ready to work, with hands-on experience and a certification that shows they were educated and trained to the same high standard. With Oregon's population growing, the need to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and an insufficient and maldistributed workforce, it is imperative that the state utilize all appropriate means to expand the health care workforce. OAHHS strongly supports HB 3596.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andi Easton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "E".

Andi Easton
Vice President of Government Affairs
Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/workforceboard/data-and-reports/Documents/Equitable-Prosperity-Task-Force-Whitepaper-June-2021.pdf>