



Support for SB 592

April 20, 2023

To: Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Elmer and Sosa, Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor

From: Russell Lum, Political Organizer, Oregon Nurses Association

Re: Support for Senate Bill 592

Dear Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Elmer and Sosa, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for Senate Bill 592 on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). ONA is a nurses union and professional association representing over 16,000 health care workers and providers, including registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. Our members work in urban and rural hospitals, clinics, school-based health centers, home health care, and county health departments across Oregon.

We strongly encourage your support of SB 592 to improve workplace safety and health in Oregon. Oregon's nurses will always care about safety on the job, for other workers and as — themselves — workers vulnerable to jobsite hazard. Hospitals routinely rank among the most dangerous places to work, with rates of illness and injury about double that of private industry generally.¹ Moving/lifting patients, dealing with sharps, exposure to chemicals, workplace violence, infectious disease — these are a some of the hazards that harm our members that rules help to guardrail and that enforcement must catch.

Meanwhile health care workers vulnerable in these ways to injury and illness are also the backbone of keeping *all others* well. ONA members on the job — on the hospital floor, and in care settings beyond hospitals — face the gaps in safety across Oregon, with injured workers as patients. More must be done to reduce the frequency and severity of needing health care from workplace occurrences.

Thus SB 592 improves current safety and health practices with the goal to make all workplaces in Oregon safer. Currently, Oregon OSHA can assess a penalty when an injury or death occurs as a result of a serious safety and health violation like a lack of training, lack of equipment maintenance or supervision, preventable exposure to toxins, or even lack of safety gear like harnesses or hard hats.

¹ <https://www.osha.gov/etools/hospitals>



However, Oregon OSHA penalties for these serious violations continue to be the lowest in the nation. In 2021 the average Oregon penalty for an injury that resulted from a serious violation was just over \$600 — 5 times less than the national average. And from an inspection due to a workplace death, Oregon's average penalty was just over \$1,000 — over 10 times less than the national OSHA penalty average.² These low penalties mean that the worst actors can commit multiple safety and health violations before the fine is significant enough to incentivize a change in behavior.

SB 592 also strengthens inspections — which we know are also a core component in making workplaces safer. SB 592 would trigger a comprehensive whole-workplace inspection if 3 or more violations occur within a year, *or* a work-related death occurs in connection to a violation. Currently, estimations suggest that it would take Oregon OSHA 112 years to inspect every workplace in Oregon.³ SB 592 ensures that when a death has occurred, a full inspection is done, checking that there are not related or wholly separate safety and health issues that could lead to another injury or death at the same workplace.

It's OSHA's charge to protect workers by providing resources to employers and workers, inspecting workplaces, and rectifying employer mistakes or negligence. SB 592 improves reporting, strengthens penalties, and helps make sure that more workplaces are safe before another injury or death occurs.

Even one worker death or injury from a preventable workplace hazard is too many and, added up, it hurts the economy, hurts our communities, and strains our already-overtaxed health care system. Please do everything you can to make workplaces as safe as possible in Oregon. We encourage your support of SB 592.

Sincerely,

Russell Lum

² https://aflcio.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/2214_DOTJ_Final_42622_nobug.pdf

³ https://aflcio.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/2214_DOTJ_Final_42622_nobug.pdf