



Testimony for the Senate Committee on Healthcare

Regarding SB 537

Jana R. Bitton, MPA
Executive Director, Oregon Center for Nursing
jana.bitton@oregoncenterfornursing.org

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Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on **SB 537**, which seeks to enhance workplace violence prevention efforts in healthcare settings. OCN maintains a neutral position on this bill but would like to highlight the critical connection between improving work environments and addressing Oregon’s healthcare workforce challenges.

Workplace Safety and Workforce Retention

As an organization dedicated to nursing workforce research and policy, OCN has extensively studied the factors influencing nurse retention and job satisfaction. Workplace safety is a primary concern for healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, who are disproportionately affected by workplace violence. Healthcare workers are **five times more likely** to experience workplace violence than workers in any other profession, and 70 percent of emergency room nurses in Oregon reported experiencing assaults at work.

Workplace violence discourages nurses from working in high-risk settings, contributing to staffing shortages and weakening the overall nursing workforce. Our [RN Well-Being Project](#) has reinforced what nurses have long reported: a work environment that prioritizes safety, mental health, and well-being is fundamental to retaining an engaged and effective nursing workforce.

Violence in healthcare settings not only endangers nurses but also exacerbates burnout, stress, and moral injury—key contributors to turnover and staffing shortages. The measures outlined in SB 537, including safety committees, training, and reporting mechanisms, align with best practices for workplace violence prevention. Ensuring that these efforts are effectively implemented so that healthcare workers feel supported is essential to strengthening Oregon’s nursing workforce.

Considerations for Implementation

While SB 537 establishes important protections, OCN urges the Legislature to consider **the operational impact on healthcare employers and frontline staff**. Workload concerns, staffing shortages, and administrative burdens can limit the effectiveness of safety initiatives. To ensure meaningful outcomes, implementation should:

- **Prioritize frontline worker input.** Nurses and direct care staff must be actively involved in shaping safety policies, including the design and evaluation of workplace violence prevention programs.
- **Address the root causes of aggression.** Workplace violence prevention must also consider underlying factors such as high patient acuity, staffing constraints, and gaps in behavioral health services.
- **Ensure funding and sustainability.** The proposed grant program for workplace violence prevention is a promising step. Long-term success requires sustainable funding mechanisms, particularly for rural and under-resourced healthcare facilities.

Conclusion

Improving healthcare work environments is essential to supporting and sustaining Oregon's nursing workforce. While OCN takes no formal position on SB 537, we support efforts to enhance workplace safety as a key strategy in workforce retention and well-being. Thank you for your time and consideration.