

Submitter: Iria Nishimura
On Behalf Of: Willamette Vital Health - Hospice
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1575

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Iria Nishimura, and I submit this testimony in support of SB 1575, legislation that strengthens Oregon's ability to ensure safe, ethical, and high-quality hospice care. SB 1575 provides the Oregon Health Authority with a practical and necessary tool to better screen hospice license applicants. Oregon has long been recognized for high-quality, community-based hospice care, but our current licensing framework does not adequately evaluate whether applicants are qualified or capable of providing safe and ethical services.

At present, the hospice license application is only a few pages long and includes minimal questions regarding the qualifications and background of applicants seeking to open a hospice in Oregon. The application does not sufficiently evaluate prior regulatory actions, poor performance history, or hospice fraud activity in other states. As a result, the Oregon Health Authority has limited authority to deny applications based on concerning histories or demonstrated quality issues.

SB 1575 would help close these gaps by giving the state stronger tools to review applicants and prevent unqualified or unethical operators from entering Oregon's hospice system.

The risks of weak licensing standards are not theoretical. In Las Vegas, Nevada — a state that has been under the federal Special Focus Program due to hospice quality and fraud concerns — a colleague of mine shared a striking experience. During a taxi ride to a national hospice conference, he spoke with the driver about hospice care. The driver explained that his sister had recently opened a hospice in Las Vegas and was already making money, and that he himself was planning to start a hospice as well.

This story illustrates how quickly hospice can be viewed as a business opportunity rather than a healthcare calling when oversight is insufficient. Without stronger licensing review, this could become the future in Oregon.

Hospice serves patients and families during the most vulnerable time of life. The state has a responsibility to ensure that providers entering this field are qualified, ethical, and capable of delivering high-quality care. SB 1575 helps protect patients while supporting the integrity of Oregon's hospice system. It strengthens oversight without creating unnecessary burdens for qualified providers.

I respectfully urge your support for SB 1575.

Sincerely,

Iria T. Nishimura

Willamette Vital Health - Hospice