



Testimony in Support of HB 3342

March 27th, 2013

House Committee on Business and Labor

Susan Bruce, RN

Oregon Nurses Association

Chair Doherty and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of HB 3342. I am a registered nurse and an ONA labor representative, working with the nurses ONA represents in Southern Oregon at Klamath County, Providence Medford Medical Center, Rogue Regional Medical Center, and Sky Lakes Medical Center. The Oregon Nurses Association is a professional union for registered nurses, representing 10,000 nurses in collective bargaining agreements throughout the state. Approximately 20 percent of ONA's members are public employees.

HB 3342 would prohibit public employers from assisting in, promoting, or deterring union organizing. It would also prohibit public employers from discharging, demoting, harassing, or otherwise taking adverse action against an individual for being involved in union organizing efforts.

I have worked as a registered nurse in the Critical Care Unit at a large hospital in Oregon since 1995. Before joining ONA's staff as a labor representative, I spent a year working on a nurses' organizing campaign leading up to a first contract.

Across Oregon, workers across different sectors choose to join a union for a variety of reasons. Many of Oregon's nurses have democratically elected to join ONA because ONA can strengthen the voice of nursing, and help to ensure each and every nurse has a voice on the job. Our members are our strength. Together, nurses can ensure the future of our profession, that our work is valued, and that our patients are cared for. As front line workers and the largest segment of the health care workforce, nurses are often the first to notice a problem or respond to a patient's needs. ONA helps to ensure that nurses concerns are voiced, heard, and addressed, helping to improve working conditions for nurses and each patients' care.

As both a nurse who has worked to organize my colleagues and democratically elect union representation and a member of ONA staff, I have seen a number of tactics employed in an attempt to discourage union membership. In past organizing campaigns, some employers have attempted to bribe nurses, others hold captive audience meetings, and others have increased security and surveillance, creating an environment that discourages nurses from speaking openly about working conditions. In one case, nurses on every unit were told it was illegal to talk about a union at work during work hours, which is simply not true.

Some employers attempt to discourage their employees from voting in a union by misrepresenting the union, the members of the union, and the union's mission. I've seen cases where administrators and CEOs have started attending staff meetings to assure staff that their issues are being heard and addressed and that the cost of having a union was significant, and we'd essentially be paying for benefits we already had. Managers also went so far as to tell staff that the nurses involved in the organizing campaign would lose their jobs when the campaign was over. Some employers have gone as far as to show a blatantly anti-union video to a group of nurses who were in the middle of an organizing campaign. The video depicted union workers as bullies and thugs, smashing car windows

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with baseball bats and physically intimidating and threatening their non-union co-workers. The film posed questions such as, “do you know where your children are at night?” When I was helping to organize the nurses at my worksite to join ONA we were told by the hospital administration that there would be pay increases for all as well as a renewed commitment for nursing education and improved staffing, without the need for union representation.

While these tactics may not seem overly disruptive to the organizing process at first glance, they can have an overwhelming impact on an organizing campaign and serve only to intimidate employees and discourage their efforts to organize. It takes an enormous amount of courage to stand up to your employer and denounce the anti-union message. When employers implement these sort of tactics, workers are much less likely to obtain the on the job representation that they may otherwise seek.

ONA nurses obtain contracts aimed at enabling nurses to provide the best possible care for patients and ensuring the best working conditions for nurses.

HB 3342 helps to ensure public employees have the right to organize without interference or intimidation from their employers. This is vital in helping to ensure that Oregon’s nurses have a voice on the job, for themselves and for their patients.

ONA urges your support of House Bill 3342.