

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

To: Oregon House Veterans and Emergency Committee

From: Benjamin Dawson, RN, chair, PPE Supply Committee, Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals

Re: HB 2727

First of all, we would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

As a labor union made up of several thousand nurses, other professionals, and technicians in the hospitals and clinics of Oregon and SW Washington, we in the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP) want to express our support, in the strongest terms, for HB 2727. For us, it is not an exaggeration to say that personal protective equipment (PPE) is the difference between life and death. And we understand how vital it is to have an adequate and reliable supply of PPE, because over the past year we have experienced what it is like to have to ration PPE—and, consequently, to risk our own lives trying to save lives in our communities.

At the beginning of the current pandemic, there was a desperate shortage of PPE in most of the world. Whatever our other conflicts with the big health-care employers where our members work, it must be acknowledged that management in our industry tried very hard last spring to get hold of PPE and was willing to spend a lot of money—but PPE often could not be had for any price.

What happened? There were a number of contributing problems, but the decisive barrier is that over the last generation, as with many other consumer goods, the big US industrial corporations have moved PPE production out of North America. In the crucial case of N95 masks, most of the world's production is now in East Asia. In the early months of the pandemic, the Chinese factories, in particular, stopped shipping across the Pacific. One can sympathize with the Chinese authorities, who were doing a pretty good job of fighting the pandemic in their own country and who needed to requisition every N95 mask they could lay their hands on; but it left us in grave danger here in North America.

Supply has improved somewhat over the past year, but supply *chains* are just as over-extended and easily disrupted as ever. We at OFNHP believe that we must rebuild manufacturing here in this region, so that there is adequate supply of the PPE we need, right here where we can get our hands on it. To say it again, we need *enough* PPE, and we need it *close by*. To do anything less is to ensure further shortages, which would turn our hospitals into places to spread disease, not to contain and fight disease.

As trade unionists, we see it as a particular travesty that we are experiencing PPE shortages here in the Northwest, which has historically been one of the world's great centers of paper manufacture. We used to make N95 masks in this region, and we know that our sister unions in the paper sector have thousands of members who are jumping at the chance to work around the clock to keep our communities safe, just as we do in health care.

The demand for PPE is vast, it is world-wide, and it is not going away any time soon. Retooling paper mills to make N95 masks is a huge opportunity for the Northwest. As trade unionists, we understand

how vital it is that we seize that opportunity and lock in stable, long-term union jobs in our communities.

That's the big picture, as we in OFNHP see it. As a consequence, we heartily support the goals and purpose of HB 2727.

What about the specifics of the bill? To be frank, we would like to see more. OFNHP is on the record as demanding that the state of Oregon use eminent domain or emergency requisitioning to seize shut-down paper mills or idle production lines within partially shut-down mills and, using the skills and experience of union members in the paper industry, convert them to the production of PPE. That said, we are certainly not against employee buy-outs. We see HB 2727 as an important first step; and if the state could deliver on the promises of the bill, no one would be happier than us at OFNHP. We look forward to contributing to this movement.

Thank you again for your attention to our testimony! If committee members, staffers, or anybody else at the capitol had questions or would like to consult with us at the Oregon Federation of Health Professionals, we would be delighted to be in further touch.