



Testimony in Support of House Bill 2813

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House Committee on Business and Labor

Russell Lum

Good afternoon Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee. My name is Russell Lum and I am a political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association. We represent 15,000 nurses — including RNs and advanced practice nurses — and allied health workers. Oregon nurses support HB 2813 because Oregon’s fire seasons are becoming longer and more hazardous; protections for workers need to keep pace with this changing reality. HB 2813 would ensure that outdoor workers in our state will no longer have to sacrifice themselves from a respiratory health perspective in order to earn a living and keep our communities fed in Oregon and beyond.

Last year’s fire season was the most active on record across the west coast, with 1.1 million acres burned in our state alone.¹ Overwhelming loss and hardships were the experience of many Oregonians as fires displaced thousands of people and put unbreathable-level particulate matter in our air. Nurses hold the view that extreme fires and fire seasons should be mitigated for the sake of Oregon’s health and health justice.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), when the Air Quality Index (AQI) is above 151, the health risks associated with smoke exposure not only cause short-term symptoms, such as eye and throat irritation, but can lead to long-term illnesses like asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonia, in addition to worsening chronic heart and lung conditions.² ONA urges all Oregonians to keep safe and follow public health guidance in such injurious environments. Often, those who can stay home and shelter — from crises like wildfire smoke, pandemics, and pollution — do. However low-wage workers, employed in essential industries and living precariously and needing every paycheck, are not afforded these same abilities to take precaution. HB 2813 takes critical steps to aid these frontline Oregonians with staying at their jobs but empowered to do so safely.

Oregon Nurses Association hopes you share our goal of wanting to help these workers and help to needed public health standards. Nurses are also looking out for the next disaster or emergency, and know that when people have already been in the sacrifice zone of an emergency, it can be in many ways too late to legislate their remedy. Please support HB 2813 today to prevent these unjust burdens for the next time, the next season.

¹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/24/climate/fires-worst-year-california-oregon-washington.html> and <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2020/10/30/climate-change-oregon-wildfires-2020/6056170002/>

² See <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/smoke.html>.