



Testimony in Support of House Bills HB 3011 and HB 3016

February 23, 2021

House Committee on Health Care

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Good afternoon Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Salinas and Hayden, and members of the committee. My name is Deborah Riddick. I am the Director of Government Relations for the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). We represent 15,000 registered nurses and professional members, and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon. We all are in strong support of HB 3011, which would update nurse staffing law processes under executive order, and of HB 3016, which would appropriately resource the OHA to ensure provisions of Oregon's nurse staffing law are fulfilled.

In January of 2020, profoundly and ironically, the World Health Organization named 2020 the Year of the Registered Nurse and Nurse Midwife. At the time, we were proud of the global recognition that our profession was not simply the most trusted but was also deserving of the attention we never seek. Fast forward to March 2020, when our state began identifying wide-spread COVID 19 cases. Oregon nurses were on the job providing a disproportionate share of healthcare services and bore a disproportionate amount of the risk; nearly a year later, the same remains true. While the rest of us were distanced from exposure, nurses were exempt from that luxury. Constant exposure and the very real threat of death has become common place for our state's nurses. As nationwide surges occurred and hotspots like New York streamed stories of deaths so numerous that refrigerated trucks were required, our nurses remained on the job. The resulting traumatic stress and anxiety still plagues our nursing workforce and will remain with them for the rest of their lives. Nurses world-wide were heralded as heroes and public sentiments of appreciation were abound. And while both accolades and sentiment are warranted, passage of HB 3011 and HB 3016 would be more meaningful demonstrations of support and solidarity with our dedicated front-line providers.

Throughout the pandemic, ONA created multiple access points to hear, first-hand, about our members experiences and frustrations. We heard from both rural and urban nurses from across the state, serving in small community facilities, mid-sized facilities, and large health systems. HB 3011 and HB 3016 are in direct response to our members' feedback and reflect a common narrative. These bills are explicit reflections from our nurses, those closest to these system deficiencies, which must be addressed. Your support would demonstrate that you hear them, believe them, and that you will do your part to protect them as they try to move forward, in a post-pandemic healthcare environment.

HB 3011 appropriates moneys from General Fund to OHA, in support of the understaffed department that currently manages implementation of the nurse staffing program and to ensure compliance is done with fidelity. It is a re-introduction of HB 4037 of 2020, which was a collaboration of OHA, OAHHS, and ONA; our OAHHS/ONA joint letter of support has been uploaded. For historical context, the establishment of our Nurse Staffing Act, and related amendments in 2017, established an infrastructure, processes, and oversight to improve collaborative problem-solving between the ONA, OAHHS, and OHA. Since that time, we have come to agree that without resources to support implementation, intended goals remain elusive. Using the collaborative framework established by the Act, the ONA, OAHHS, and OHA, guided by the recommendations of Oregon's Nurse Staffing Advisory Board, have identified program improvements that require this appropriation. Our shared responsibility for quality patient care and safe nurse staffing



brought us together, to request with one voice, that you fully fund implementation. HB 3016 is unfinished business as HB 4037 received support from both chambers and was only stalled by an abbreviated session.

HB 3016 is a forward-thinking solution that address an oversight in current law related to executive order declaration. Currently, under such an order, nurse staffing plans are suspended until the order expires or is rescinded. At the time, no one envisioned a pandemic that could keep an executive order in place for a year or more. We now know different and need to update the law to ensure collaboration on a flexible, facility-based, contingency plan is developed by nurses and administrators. Our nurse staffing committees are a national model that should be utilized, especially during times of crisis so ensure predictability and efficiency in process.

Our nurses are the backbone of the healthcare industry. We serve in nearly every healthcare setting and do so with pride and compassion. Our state was able to manage and suppress anticipated surges, against all odds, due in no small part to our nurses. Our nurses showed up for communities all over the state. They need you to show up for them by unanimously supporting HB 3011 and HB 3016. Send a clear message that their continued sacrifice warrants the protections and certainty they are seeking. We urge your support. Stand with Oregon nurses and vote yes to HB 3011 and 3016.