



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Prusak
Vice-Chairs Hayden and Salinas
Members of the House Health Care Committee

FR: Catie Theisen, OR AFL-CIO

RE: HB 3011, HB 3016 Support

February 23, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. As such, we represent both health care workers and thousands of Oregon workers and patients. We are in strong support of HB 3016, which would help ensure safe staffing during a State of Emergency and HB 3011, which would appropriately resource OHA to ensure provisions of Oregon's Safe Nurse Staffing law are fulfilled.

Undoubtedly, essential workers have kept our economy running and our communities safe during the pandemic. However, too few proactive protections have been extended to those workers. First responders, health care workers and nurses at the forefront of direct patient care were asked to do so much more with less -- with inadequate PPE, with a lack of clarity and consistent information, and an overall lack of preparedness where they work.

HB 3016 helps make sure that we learn from those mistakes to have a proactive plan and approach in place for the next emergency. Currently, Oregon's nurse staffing plans have been suspended because of the State of Emergency Executive Order and will be until it expires or is rescinded. Consequently, these collaborative and tailor-made plans for each hospital that dictate appropriate and effective nurse staffing have not been in place, meaning that nurses are being asked to try to take care of a significantly greater number of patients. This has a physical and emotional toll on nurses, but also on patients. Studies continue to substantiate that dedicated nurse care results in greater survival rates and improved health outcomes for patients. Every effort should be made to achieve those nurse and patient outcomes, even in an emergency.

HB 3016 addresses this by simply updating the Nurse Staffing law to ensure that the same collaborative, facility-based approach is also used to quickly develop a staffing contingency plan under a State of Emergency Executive Order. HB 3011 addresses the ongoing problem of enforcement of the Nurse Staffing Plan. The Oregon Health Authority is tasked with enforcing violations to the staffing law, however often lacks the capacity to investigate and enforce violations. The bill addresses this by appropriating General Fund dollars to OHA for added enforcement.

We understand that the unique stressors everyone -- both workers and employers -- faced at the onset of COVID-19. However, COVID-19 is likely not the last infectious disease outbreak or public health or environmental emergency we will see in the coming decades. Now is the time to rectify and learn from mistakes and oversights made during and before the pandemic for a critical set of essential workers. We encourage your Yes vote on HB 3016 and HB 3011 to protect and respect Oregon's nurses both during a state of emergency and in their everyday work.