

February 3, 2022

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Labor & Business Committee
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: SB 1545 Future Ready Oregon

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp and members of the Senate Committee on Labor & Business:

On behalf of Oregon's 62 community hospitals and the patients they serve, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHS) supports SB 1545 (2022), the Future Ready Oregon workforce investment package, and the overall intent of the state to invest in the current and future workforce. We appreciate the package's focus on health care as a key industry, and hope this package is the start of other investments to support innovation needed to retain and recruit an adequate healthcare workforce.

The core mission of hospitals and health systems is caring for people in their time of need, requiring staff to be available and prepared 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. To fulfill that mission on behalf of our communities, hospitals and health systems need compassionate, skilled, trained, and dedicated professionals at all levels of our workforce. Simply put, a hospital cannot provide the best care to patients, families, and the communities they serve without access to a diverse pool of potential employees.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workforce challenges have only been exacerbated and, in some cases, worsened. Nationally, nearly one in five health care workers have quit their jobs during the pandemic, citing the pandemic and associated stress as the primary reason for their exit. It may take years for the workforce to "normalize" to the needs of the system, in whatever the new "normal" looks like, to best serve our communities.

There are no easy answers, and it is likely that it will take a variety of strategies and policy measures as well as public-private partnerships to make an impact on health care workforce challenges. Short-term policy should only be the start of the conversation and focused on retaining and supporting the workforce we have now. Long-term policy and investments should focus on bolstering the pipeline with people who want to work in health care and ensure that we match the capacity of higher-education, apprenticeships, and other training programs with the huge demand for trained professionals. This will take public, private, local, and state – as well as labor and management – partnerships along with innovative thinking to address Oregon's workforce challenges.

OAHS wants to ensure this committee also understands our support for additional measures that are under consideration by the Legislature that warrant your support. OAHS supports:

HB 4003 (2022) which provides short-term policy fixes such as:

- Developing a nurse internship license for an eligible nursing student to allow them to work, receiving credit and compensation for their time, providing a direct pathway to a good job.

- Creating a workgroup to report back to future legislatures on long-term solutions to address nurse educators and faculty positions, which may include tax credits and other incentives.
- Looking at how to support our nurses today through the Oregon Wellness Program and licensure flexibilities, including allowing RNs in good standing in other states to practice immediately in Oregon if they are applying for an Oregon endorsement, as well as discussing the potentials of other long-term solutions such as licensing compacts.

HB 4004 (2022) which establishes a grant program available to providers to spend 75% of their grant directly on compensation and the other 25% on other workforce retention efforts.

- While this does not directly impact hospital providers, as they are carved out of the definition of providers, this will have a dramatic impact on pre- and post-hospital behavioral health resources that are crucial to care for Oregonians.
- The Oregon chapter for the National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI-OR) have identified the need to develop and implement new behavioral health rates that cover costs and professional wages for staff. This long-term solution is necessary for retention and recruitment of the behavioral health workforce. OAHHS supports expanding the mental health workforce and ensuring it is culturally and linguistically responsive.

Funding Oregon Health & Science University 30-30-30 initiative to increase the number of graduates in key health care professions by 30%; diversify OHSU learners by 30% by 2030.

- OHSU is working to significantly increase the number of graduates from its health care programs, adding thousands of new, high-quality clinicians to the state's hospitals and clinics within the next 10 years.
- Without legislative action, workforce challenges in Oregon will only become more pronounced.

Real change takes time, and there's no time to lose. At its best, Oregon's health care system is a model of collaboration and patient-centered care. Let's show the nation we can lead the way with solutions to this national problem.

Thank you,



Sean Kolmer
Senior Vice President of Policy and Strategy
Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems