



Testimony in Support of HB 4003

February 7, 2022

House Committee on Health Care

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Thank you Chair Prusak, Vice-Chairs Salinas and Hayden, and members of the committee.

I am Dr. Diane Solomon, member of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) Board of Directors, Chair of Nurse Practitioners of Oregon, psychiatric nurse practitioner in private practice, and assistant professor at OHSU. I am honored to represent ONA today in support of HB 4003 as one of ONA's 15,000 nurses and nurse practitioners.

The pandemic has uncovered a long-suffering healthcare system that privileges profits before patients and unsafe nurse staffing algorithms that determine the fewest possible nurses to cover the maximum number of patients. Although healthcare was a slowly brewing crisis prior to COVID-19, it is now a pandemic in its own right, with up to forty percent of nurses leaving acute care, staffing that makes it impossible to meet basic needs of patients for assessment, cleanliness, and feeding (let alone acute and complex medical care) and nurses literally dying by infection, suicide, or overdose.

I understand this personally and professionally. My 89-year-old father was hospitalized with a simple ulcer last month and nearly died due to unsafe staffing. Nurses in my private therapy practice arrive each week bearing stories of dying patients, no time to grieve or debrief, and unacknowledging, unsupportive supervisors and administrators piling more on.

We are hemorrhaging nurses. HB 4003 will help meet needs of recruitment as well as retention of a veteran, experienced workforce with essential skills. Furthermore, funding expansion of the successful Oregon Wellness Program (OWP) to include nurses will absolutely offer intensely needed mental health care. In this way, nurses will be able to keep working without sacrificing their own health and mental health. I've seen this in my own practice and know it as I am an OWP Executive Committee member. I have heard the calls of nurses needing—yet unable to access—mental health care. We need to answer their call.

Thank you for considering HB 4003 and for prioritizing nurses today and every day into the future.