



## Memorandum

To: Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business

From: Marty Carty, Government Affairs Director, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: February 8, 2022

Re: Support for SB 1549

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On behalf of the Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) and Oregon's community health centers, I respectfully request your support for SB 1549.

OPCA is a non-profit organization with a mission to support Oregon's 34 community health centers, also known as federally qualified health centers, in leading the transformation of primary care to achieve health equity for all. Health centers deliver integrated primary, oral and behavioral health care services to over **466,000 Oregonians of which 40% identify as a racial or ethnic minority**. Community health centers are providers within the CCO networks, providing care to some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations, including **one in six Oregon Health Plan members**.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the chronic shortage of health care workers – into policy conversations across the world and right here in Oregon. The shortage of caregivers from hospitals to primary care clinics is staggering and experts tell us the gap will continue to grow. There isn't any one component of the health care delivery system that can sustain a chronic shortage of staff. The interconnectedness of our system of care means that if any one sector of the system is understaffed, both the public and outcomes suffer.

We hear far too often of patients boarding in emergency departments waiting for a bed in a long term care or behavioral health facility. For community health centers, many of which are recognized as Patient-Centered Primary Care Homes and serve diverse populations, particularly patients with serious and long-term chronic conditions that can be effectively managed in community settings the shortage of health care workers has forced health centers to turn to staffing agencies to fill vacant positions.

Health centers rely on staffing agencies to fill vacancies due to both a shortage of available workers and when their regular staff must quarantine due to COVID-19 infection. From the front desk to treatment rooms and dental chairs temporary staff are critical for health centers to maintain access to health care for their communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated our members' reliance on health care staffing agencies – up **83 percent** from pre-pandemic utilization. It is becoming increasingly difficult to absorb **steep increases in operational costs** for health centers which are predominantly nonprofit and predominantly dependent on rates from the state, meaning compensation to the workforce is often reliant on action at the state level, not the provider level.

We believe that SB 1549 is a commonsense solution that will level the playing field across the health care delivery system. Right now, we are all competing against each other for scarce staff which leaves organizations that primarily serve the safety net population at a significant resource disadvantage.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of SB 1549 with you today.