



Date: February 1, 2023  
To: House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care  
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland  
Re: Support for Health Professional Recruitment and Retention, HB 2773

Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 2773. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

"Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, health care professionals across all demographics were in high demand, especially health care professionals of color. With health inequities for racial and ethnic groups such as life expectancy, infant mortality, and preterm birth rates, as well as the prevalence of obesity and hypertension all differing in severity by race and ethnicity, it is clear the importance of a workforce that is culturally and linguistically representative of the communities it serves"<sup>1</sup> as highlighted by the Oregon Health Authority's "2020 Diversity of Oregon's Licensed Health Care Workforce" report. Currently, Oregon is not meeting this culturally specific need of its community. A key finding, per "The Diversity of Oregon's Licensed Health Care Workforce," a report that synthesizes data collected from 2014 through January 2020 to explore the race, ethnicity, gender, and language makeup of Oregon's licensed health care professionals, "was that the region's licensed health care workforce is less racially and ethnically diverse than the population being served, with Whites and Asians being overrepresented. 1.8% of health care professionals were Black. Since 2016, the percentage of White providers has decreased from 83.4% to 80.3% in 2020, while Black providers increased from 1.6% to 1.9%." <sup>2</sup>

In Oregon, the health care workforce diversity was increasing from 2016-2020 but then the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the health care workforce, pushing many to the breaking point, leading to burnout and a staffing crisis, which has continued to worsen over the last few years. Oregon continues to struggle to recruit and retain health care professionals, especially nurses. In the 2022 Oregon Talent Assessment, by ECONorthwest and Program and Policy Insight, "the assessment confirmed the longstanding constraints in the market for health care workers, such as registered nurses and dental assistants." <sup>3</sup> According to the assessment, "the health care industry reported the greatest difficulty with hiring and retention (90%). Health care employers reported that hiring and retention challenges were due to a shortage of qualified candidates (83%) and conditions unrelated to candidate skills (17%), such as increased workloads, lack of affordable housing or childcare, or concerns about the coronavirus. Also, health care sector employers were most likely to cite housing and cost of living as having a high (71%) or

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Health Authority, 2020 Diversity of Oregon's Licensed Health Care Workforce, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Health Authority, 2020 Diversity of Oregon's Licensed Health Care Workforce, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> ECONorthwest and Program and Policy Insight, 2022 Oregon Talent Assessment, 2022.



moderate (19%) impact on hiring. The percentage of employers reporting efforts to diversify was high in health care (90%). Among respondents who were trying to diversify their workforce, 68% were trying to diversify by gender and 89% were trying to diversify by race/ethnicity. Multiple employers, including those from health care, noted the importance of diverse staff in promoting positive outcomes (e.g., for patients or customers) or responsive products. ”<sup>4</sup>

With HB 2773, \$47 million will be allocated so we can recruit, retain, and diversify the health care industry in Oregon. HB 2773 will require the Oregon Health Authority to provide incentives to increase the recruitment and retention of local public health professionals. These incentives include tax subsidies, bonuses, housing assistance, scholarships, child care subsidies, student loan forgiveness, professional development, financial assistance, and much more. HB 2773 will also provide incentives to increase the recruitment and retention of professionals in the local public health workforce who have associate, bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degrees or other credentials, who are people of color. These incentives will help support people interested in going into the health care workforce, making licensing and education more obtainable and equitable.

Please pass HB 2773 to ensure that we continue to support our health by investing in the health care workforce. Oregonians trust you to see the value in their health, particularly the Black communities in Oregon that seek representation in the health care industry.

Respectfully,

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<sup>4</sup> ECONorthwest and Program and Policy Insight, 2022 Oregon Talent Assessment, 2022.