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House Bill 2697 Testimony

Good afternoon, Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and Committee Members:

My name is Jenn Willemsen-Gilbert and I am a nurse at Mckenzie-Willamette Medical Center. Our hospital closed the "step down" unit due to staffing shortages without any warning or transparency. Suddenly I was given, without any training, critical care patients including post open heart surgery patients.

That day that I felt so unsupported, I felth that my RN license - my livelihood- did not matter, and neither did patient safety. I was completely untrained to care for cardiac patients, but was just expected to "deal with it." The result? I left the bedside.

Unfortunately, as hospitals engage in drastic budget cuts while facing unprecedented community need for services, executives repeatedly choose to ignore staffing standards and demand nursing staff "stretch" or "flex" by taking more patients than allowed in the staffing plan.

Executives refuse to provide staff to adjust for sicker patients that demand more nursing work.

In fact, conditions in hospitals have deteriorated so badly that in 2018 nurses represented by the Oregon Nurses Association requested additional staff, via an online form, for just over 1,600 shifts. In 2021 that number jumped to 3,500. Over the last several years, well before the pandemic, hospital executives created a health care system that is now failing Oregonians and nurses.

This cycle of mismanagement must be interrupted to rebuild a functional system for all Oregonians.

If we do not solidify these staffing standards in a law that is diligently and consistently enforced, more nurses will leave the bedside and Oregonians will have less access to care.

Thank you for considering this important bill.

Jenn Willemsen-Gilbert