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To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care
Testimony in Support of HB 2699

To the Committee,

My name is Peggy Elia and I am a nurse at Providence Milwaukie Hospital in Milwaukie, Oregon.

As a resource nurse one of my main roles is to cover Intensive Care unit nurses for their breaks. Frequently, due to short staffing, resource nurses have been pulled to cover an assignment. This leaves ICU nurses without anyone to cover them for breaks so they cannot take one, and are forced to eat their meals, if they can, on the unit while providing patient care. Additionally, this means there is no resource nurse to be available throughout the hospital.

Nurses regularly miss their rest and meal breaks due to the external pressures of unsafe staffing levels (there just aren't enough nurses to get the work done) and the internal pressures of feeling guilt (taking a break often means piling more work on to your colleagues.) Research indicates that the leading causes of nurse fatigue are excessive workloads (60%), being unable to take lunch and dinner breaks during a shift (42%) and not being able to take any break of any kind during a shift (41%), according to a study by the Workforce Institute.

Aside from the obvious physical impacts of denying your body food, drink, trips to the restroom, and working for 12 hours (or longer) without any kind of relief from providing patient care, the reality is that this also takes an enormous toll on a nurse's mental and emotional health. It also puts patient care at risk.

HB 2967 focuses attention on ensuring nurses have both sufficient staff to provide safe patient care, but also helps ensure nurses are given their crucial (and legally required) rest and meal breaks.

Thank you for considering this important bill.

Peggy Elia, RN