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February 26, 2023

RE: Testimony in support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care:

My name is Emily Rios and I am a critical care RN at OHSU in the neurosurgical ICU. I am writing to ask you to help nurses safely care for their patients in Oregon while maintaining their dignity and preserving the mental health of nurses. We need safe staffing and more nurses. The hospitals must be legally compelled to do all they can to provide staffing to care for their patients because they have not done so of their own accord. This staffing crisis has been on the horizon for decades due to the aging Baby Boomer generation. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the staffing crisis has been and will be here for decades. The hospitals need to employ real solutions now. We especially need staff coverage for breaks. There are days when my patients are too unstable to leave unattended safely, and I cannot take a lunch break in a 12-hour shift. Being unable to take a break to eat in 12 hours is inhumane to both nurse and patient. Patients deserve to be cared for by nurses who are well cared for, rested, and able to meet their basic human needs. For the past 3 years, there has been a severe strain on all staff. With decreased staffing and no breaks day after day, this is very mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting. Nurses suffer moral injury when they cannot provide safe patient care according to basic nursing standards. For example, I have had shifts where patients laid in their excrement for hours, unable to clean or turn them to relieve the pressure that causes sore development because I had to attend to more urgent issues. This could have been relieved by having more hands and more nurses.

OHSU's solution has been to continue to rely on costly travel nurses and pay Nurse Practitioners, CRNA's, and Medical Residents premiums as "helping hands". I have had two "Helping Hands"- a CRNA and a Resident. Unfortunately, they are not bedside nurses and are not trained in critical care. These shifts turned into them shadowing me and my teaching them what I do in a shift. OHSU did not offer these same premiums to actual nurses. This was insulting, wasteful, and not helpful to patients.

As a well-funded teaching hospital and academic center with a robust nursing program, they have many resources to creatively solve this problem by working to retain nurses and creating better working conditions if legally compelled.

Please support HB 2697 and give nurses the help they need and the safe and dignified care that patients deserve.

Sincerely yours,
Emily Rios