

Jamie Wilson
1792 SW Tamarack St.
McMinnville, Oregon 97128

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RE: Testimony in support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Jamie Wilson and I am a nurse at OHSU in the Trauma Surgical Intensive Care Unit.

I have been an ICU nurse for over 18 years. These past few years have been especially difficult working in a hospital and caring for patients that have become sicker and require more intensive monitoring and nursing interventions due to the nature of their illnesses. In the past two and a half years, I have seen over 80 of my colleagues leave the ICU that they so loved working in. They are tired and burned out from working in poor conditions and in a constant state of being understaffed. These are skilled, intelligent nurses with years of experience and it is difficult to replace that. Safe staffing is not only imperative to staff retention, but also to providing safe, quality care that our patients deserve. Many shifts, I have seen nurses stressed and to the breaking point, even crying because they are stretched too thin and don't feel as though they can provide adequate care to their patients. Our patients deserve to have enough staff to meet their needs. Another thing that I have noticed lately, is that when any other department is short staffed (such as housekeeping, respiratory care, transportation, etc), nursing is expected to pick up the slack. However, that is never taken into consideration for our staffing levels, so we just end up having a higher workload without any additional staffing added.

There have been many shifts where my colleagues and I have worked 12 hour shifts with no breaks because of the staffing levels in our hospital. It is unsafe to leave a sick ICU patient (or two for that matter) in the care of another nurse that has two patients assigned to them as well. Working long shifts without a break is exhausting and extremely unsafe for both nurses and patients. There is no way for one nurse to adequately or safely monitor four ICU patients at one time. We have piloted break nurses many times in our hospital, but our administrators keep telling us the same thing. They need more data to support giving us break nurses because it has to be justified financially, even though it is a clear violation of labor laws. Nursing directors and managers will come through the unit and pass out candy and treats and tell us how hard we are working and thank us for all of the hard work we do. This is not what we want to hear and honestly it is more of a slap in the face. We want safe staffing and breaks so that we can continue to provide quality care to our patients. The problem that I see in Oregon is not a lack of qualified nurses, but a lack of nurses that are willing to continue to work in the current conditions. Please help the nurses and patients throughout our state by passing HB 2697.

Sincerely,

Jamie Wilson, RN BSN