

Submitter: Carisa Merchant

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2697

Carisa Merchant
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RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Carisa Merchant and I am a nurse at OHSU on the 14C Medicine Unit.

Management at hospitals across Oregon have shared dozens of messages praising nurses as "heroes," and claiming to care about patient safety while, at the same time, they have failed to keep patients and healthcare staff safe by ignoring our repeated pleas for assistance. To be frank, these last few years have been extremely difficult for nurses. We don't care about being called heroes; we want help.

We need more staff.

Safe staffing ratios are directly correlated with less medical errors. Would you want your loved one to be cared for by a nurse that was being stretched thin? We're human and it's easy to miss the little things when we've got a lot on our plate. Often smaller but very important tasks such as bed baths, CHX baths, oral care, and turning bed bound patients fall by the way side when units are not properly staffed, leading to risks for serious pressure injuries, pneumonia, CAUTIs, and bacteremia. Little things add up to big things QUICKLY with our critically ill patients. Being one of the most profitable critical access hospitals in Oregon, my hospital should be putting our patients before profits. It's the moral and humane thing to do. Our community deserves better. Oregon's nurse deserve better, and our patients deserve more staff.

Please support HB 2697 and give nurses what they really need: help.

?The work environment for nurses at my hospital is extremely troubling. Not only are we regularly understaffed, on almost every single shift, we frequently do not have enough staff to ensure we get our legally required breaks. I can't tell you how many times I have had to skip lunch due to understaffing, and I cannot begin to describe the debilitating effects working long hours without breaks has done to my physical

and mental health. Working long shifts of 12 hours or more, without a break or a lunch, is exhausting and, quite frankly, dangerous for both nurses and patients. We are burning out at a record pace. ? ?We all know that Oregon had a staffing shortage long before the pandemic. Yes, the COVID 19 pandemic has made already existing staffing issues worse, and Oregon is now facing a full-blown crisis as countless overworked and undervalued healthcare workers leave the bedside in search of safer working conditions, better pay, or simply leaving their profession entirely. Nurses and other health care workers have been asking hospital executives and managers for help for more than a decade, and we have not gotten it. HB 2697 seeks to address many of the root causes of this crisis including requiring minimum safe nurse staffing and enforcement of legally required rest and meal breaks. The problem in Oregon is not that we don't have enough nurses. The problem is we don't have enough nurses who are willing to work in these conditions. Please, help nurses and our patients by passing HB 2697.

Sincerely,

Carisa Merchant