

Jerry Lemmons
Chair, Kaiser Technical Employees Bargaining Unit
Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals
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House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care
Representative Rob Nosse, Chair
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Written testimony in support of House Bill 2697

Representative Nosse and members of the House Health Care Committee:

My name is Jerry Lemmons and I am the Chair of the Technical Employees Bargaining Unit for workers at Kaiser Permanente of the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP), AFT Local 5017. Our bargaining unit is the exclusive representative for approximately 1,000 workers in Oregon and Southwest Washington. I am testifying in adamant support of the proposed House Bill 2697 regarding the requirement of hospitals to establish staffing committees for technical and service staff and require the development of jointly created staffing plans separately from and on par with the nurse staffing committees already established in Oregon Law.

Staffing shortages are not a new issue like the hospitals would like you to believe, nor are they due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are challenges to adequately staff the hospitals, but not because there are no more trained healthcare workers but due to years of decisions to follow lean hospital staffing plans - a concept originally designed to eliminate unnecessary "waste" but instead has been used to cut, cut, and cut away to more profitable quarterly financial statements. These plans have consistently left workers understaffed, exhausted physically and morally, and unable to take care of their patients in the proper way they swore an oath to uphold. It has put their careers, licenses, and livelihoods on the line. And while the workers plead for more help, employers scapegoat the healthcare worker for delays in care, missed assessments, and troublesome events in patient care.

Nursing isn't the only profession leaving the industry and Oregon for worksites with better staffing even when it comes with reduced pay rates. I receive many calls from hospital technical employees stating that there are not enough staff to run proper, sterile, and safe surgeries in a timely manner. That there are not enough staff to help fix a broken bone and put on a cast in a reasonable timeframe, which can lead to expensive unnecessary surgery and prolonged recovery. That there are not enough staff to take meals and rest periods required by the law

during a twelve-hour shift. My union members call me crying before work telling me that they cannot work another day without adequate staff as their coworkers and patients are suffering due to bad corporate decisions.

This bill would require for the first time that non-RN workers in Oregon hospitals, like those of us who watch heart rhythms of sick people, prevent infections in operating rooms, manage life-support breathing machines, assist with physical therapy, that our voice is listened to in determining how many staff we need to keep you safe. That for the first time in law, those of us who do incredibly invaluable work outside of Nursing matter to the delivery of healthcare in acute hospitals. Without this law, we will continue to be viewed as expenses that need to be reduced to whatever extent the hospital organizations can get away with.

In summary, I am asking you to support this bill for not only the hospital technical employees that work within Oregon but, more importantly, for the patients and their families that come to receive our care. I am asking you all to think about the members of the community that need our highly-skilled services when their life and limbs are on the line and they are at their most vulnerable. I am in favor of House Bill 2697 in hopes that I do not soon need to utilize hospital services, but when I do, there will be the trained staff available to care for me, my wife, or my amazing six-year-old daughter.

For safer patient care,

Jerry Lemmons
Chair, Kaiser Technical Employees Bargaining Unit
OFNHP AFT Local 5017