

Submitter: Molly Burtchaell

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2697

Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support in favor of House Bill 2697. My name is Molly Burtchaell and I am a nurse at Providence Portland Medical Center.

I work in Labor & Delivery and I have been a nurse for 23 years. While I love this job and care deeply about my patients, I am disappointed with and exhausted by how the health care system is set up to fail to protect nurses and the patients we care for. Providence Portland Labor and Delivery began the Pandemic with inadequate staffing. The strategy, systemwide, appeared to be saving money by squeezing nurses as tightly as possible. Then the pandemic hit for which we needed twice the nursing staff, and Providence was left sitting on their hands! Soon we were asked to do even more with even less because, as it turns out, many RNs said no to this intolerable squeezing and left. According to a Nurses.org survey, 87% of nurses are burnt out.

We have staffing plans and a Staffing Committee which are designed to protect us from having inadequate staffing. But Providence leadership consistently shirks the standards established by them and the Oregon Health Authority has done nothing to hold them accountable. HB 2697 will hold Providence accountable! There have been so many moments where RNs on my unit have worked tirelessly and valiantly to get through a shift where we were inadequately staffed. I can think of one shift, in particular, where we had MDs at the desk watching strips of patients that were not their patients (some of them high risk and needed one on one care). This was necessary because we were performing a crash cesarean in one of our ORs and attending to a patient in triage who was 25 weeks pregnant with ruptured membranes who needed to be transferred to a higher acuity facility. It may have been that all our patients received adequate care that day. But working a shift like this where we are responsible for lives, mothers and babies, and enduring work on the literal edge of a bad outcome, has a cost. The physical and emotional fatigue that comes, not from just one experience like this, but multiple repeated shifts like this has a cost – for nurses and for our patients and the community.

Nearly every nurse I know feels the same pain and outrage at unsustainable demands, and I've seen many leave my hospital after the job became too much. We know that higher staffing levels equate to better patient outcomes as well as decreased maternal mortality and morbidity. Higher staffing levels should not be something we have to fight the health provider system about. But here we are. Providence has shown that they will not ensure safe staffing if they don't have to. For the good of the nurses and the patients, please pass HB 2697.