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RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2697

To the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

My name is Debra Scoles, I am a nurse at Providence Portland Medical Center in the Oncology Unit

Management at hospitals across Oregon have shared dozens of messages praising nurses as “heroes,” while, at the same time, 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 fewer medical errors. Would you want your loved one, or yourself, to be cared for by a nurse stretched too thin? Nurses are human and desire to provide the best care possible to each patient. In providing care to more patients with fewer resources, it is easy to miss the early signs of problems. Little signs can add up to bigger things QUICKLY with our critically ill and complex patients. My hospital, and other hospitals across Oregon, should be putting patient safety before profits and ensuring a safe care environment for patients and their families. Nurses are at the front line of ensuring patient safety and positive outcomes. Please help nurses to provide the best and safest care possible for all patients across Oregon.

Please support HB 2697 and give nurses what we really need: Help.

I moved to Oregon in 2002 and began working at my current hospital. Prior to this, I worked in Southern California at a prestigious hospital in an affluent area. For several years before moving, the nurse to patient ratio at my hospital was 6-7 patients to each

RN. This was before the California staffing law was passed, which illustrates how decisions can be made in hospitals without guidelines in place.

I cannot emphasize enough the stress, emotional toll and fear that often was shared by myself and my colleagues during those years. Not only did we routinely eat our lunch while sitting at the desk charting, we also were often late leaving due to needing to complete charting. If a nurse had a patient or two develop symptoms requiring more interventions and close monitoring, it was often difficult to balance these care needs with the needs of the other 5-6 patients on the assignment. Medication errors happened, patient needs went unmet, and occasionally severe outcomes happened due to the time demands on the nurse. It was very difficult to help each other due to being stretched so thinly. Many nurses left due to the moral distress of fear that she/he would harm a patient. I fear this may be the experience of Oregon nurses in the near future if we don't have the help we need.

I would like to now share with you the experience one of my colleagues brought to me last week. She is new to nursing, on the unit for 1 year or so. She was assigned 5 patients on her night shift. There was no support of a CNA on the shift that night and the charge RN had a patient due to a lack of skilled nurses on shift. My colleague shared with me her distress of this night in trying to meet the psychosocial needs of a patient in distress with a new diagnosis of cancer while two other patients were calling her for help.

She stated she had rounded on all her patients and ensured from them they had no immediate needs. When her patient began to share with her, she knew she needed to be present and listen to what was being shared. Her vocera called her a few times during the conversation but she stayed to meet this patient's need to talk during a time of grief and distress. She shared that while she knew the other two patients were fine based on recent rounding, she also felt guilty not going immediately to them. She was torn between the need before her and the need presented by the other patient calls. She hoped someone would answer the lights, but had little hope that might happen due to the staffing that night. Her own distress was not being able to meet all the needs in the moments they were expressed and not having the help to lean on in a moment of need.

My concern is also a future one, the concern of nurses leaving the profession due to the distress I have just described and not having adequate providers in the very near future. Overworking nurses and shortchanging patients for profits is not the answer to our healthcare needs. Please protect nurses now and in the future by passing HB 2697.

Sincerely yours,

Debra Scoles BSN RN OCN

