



Safe Staffing Saves Lives

Hospital Workers and Patients Need House Bill 2697

February 28, 2023

To: Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and Members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

Re: HB 2697 Support

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care,

We need more workers on floors of our hospitals across Oregon, and addressing the employer behavior of understaffing must be a key part of the state's response. There was a staffing problem long before the pandemic. For years hospitals and health networks have been deprioritizing direct care, to instead put money in their investment portfolios and executive compensation.

This neglect of staffing abandons workers on whom we all rely, causes them at times unsafe assignments, and contributes to workers leaving their professions due to burnout.

COVID-19 compounds these problems: before COVID, care staff such as nurses commonly found it impossible to provide the best care to patients due to being under-resourced; under COVID circumstances, this is a daily reality and the demands of patient care in our hospitals are a steep overmatch for the number of people on-hand to do it.

In order to improve health outcomes, to make our critically important occupations safe and highly retained, and to shore up health care quality and our state's health system overall, advocates put forth the changes to law of HB 2697.

House Bill 2697 will:

- For hospital nursing staff, establish numerical standards for how many patients a nurse may be charged with caring for — the standard serving as a floor
- Resolve the difficulty of nurses' inability to properly take their meals and breaks due to their workload
- Entrust strong enforcement to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), including with increased penalties to hospitals that are out of compliance, and applying final and binding arbitration as the resolution when staffing committees are deadlocked between worker and management staffing-plan proposals
- Enact transparency in hospital staffing by creating a website run by OHA where staffing plans are posted
- Expand the staffing committee model — creating new staffing committees for hospital technical staff, hospital service staff, and professional staff
- Retain and strengthen participation and voice of nursing professionals beyond RN, such as certified nursing assistants (CNAs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs)

This amounts to a safe staffing policy delivering broad-based and sorely needed benefits to Oregon health care. It prioritizes safety, workers' voices as it pertains to their workplace and their sector's retention needs, transparency, and accountability. Our organizations support House Bill 2697 and urge you to pass it this session.

AFT-Oregon
Ironworkers Local 29
Northwest Workers' Justice Project
Nurses for Single Payer
Oregon & Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers (LIUNA)
Oregon AFL-CIO
Oregon Education Association
Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP)
Oregon Nurses Association
Oregon Trial Lawyers Association
Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)
Portland Jobs with Justice - Health Care Committee and Faith-Labor Committee
PROTEC17
SMART Local 16
UFCW Local 555