

Submitter: Sarah Mittelman

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2697

Sarah Mittelman

3504 F ST

Vancouver WA., 98663

Chair Nosse, committee members: I am Sarah Mittelman, a Registered Nurse in a psychiatric emergency department, urging you to support HB 2697.

With our current short staffing, our RNs are failing to keep up with the complexity of our patient population, and it has become increasingly difficult to keep patients and staff safe.

Without proper staffing, we are unable to avoid adverse outcomes, which leads to time spent in seclusion. 4,187 orders of patient seclusion were documented in nine months. We desperately need staff available to intervene at the right times to address patients who are in crises, and this won't happen until working conditions improve.

I have been the victim of physical assault more than once while on duty. I was recently bit by a patient while attempting to remove an object being used to self-harm. Despite not having enough staff to monitor care spaces safely, I was instructed to bring back an emotionally dysregulated client to triage. The patient quickly escalated, tore out every computer monitor in our shared space, and threw every monitor at me. I had no egress and nowhere to hide. Only when my shift was complete was I allowed to leave with my new bruises and cuts to my legs. In a third event, while talking with a patient, a different patient came up behind me, put his hand between my legs, and touched me so firmly I could feel each of his fingers as he tried to push them into my soft tissue. All these events occurred on shifts that were insufficiently staffed.

After five years on the Nurse Staffing Committee, this year, I stepped down out of frustration at the lack of meaningful and effective changes. The sum total of the factors I have described contributes to increased staff burnout and turnover rates. When nurses leave, it severely strains those of us who remain.

I am begging legislators to support HB 2697 to support our patients and the brave nurses willing to care for them to decrease health disparities among Oregon's most vulnerable population.

Thank you,
Sarah Mittelman BS RN CEN