

March 2, 2023

Subject: SB 523

I am writing to support SB 523, the Bachelor of Science Nursing Degree bill. As you know, the demand for qualified, competent nurses continues to grow nationwide. You may also be aware that Oregon's nursing programs produced the third-fewest graduates per capita of any state in 2020. Following the pandemic that gripped our nation, the looming cliff of those leaving the workplace and anticipated retirees will only exacerbate the problem. SB 523 will provide Oregon with a clear strategy to face the nurse shortage in Oregon while at the same time cultivating educational programs, specifically in those traditionally underserved communities.

Throughout Oregon, the 17 Community Colleges are working with local healthcare partners to train nurses to meet the demand. However, the passage of SB 523 would provide community colleges the ability to offer a Bachelor of Science (BSN) in nursing, which would align with industry-recognized standards. The barrier for students who complete an applied baccalaureate degree is that many employers in the healthcare field do not recognize this degree, making it less valuable to students.

Today, our best and brightest nursing students are leaving their rural communities to access opportunities to earn an industry-recognized Bachelor of Science in nursing in the more urban areas of Oregon. Some of those students do not return to the communities that arguably need their services the most. More importantly, the limitations associated with the current system eliminate the chance for those who are place-bound even to consider accessing the 4-year degree programs which provide a BSN. The existing structure creates an equity issue in that not all students start from the same place, and we must acknowledge and adjust to imbalances.

I encourage you to support SB 523 as we all come together as educators to address the qualified nursing shortage, provide accessible and affordable opportunities for all Oregonians, and recognize high-quality healthcare should not be limited based on where you live.

Sincerely,

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