

Good afternoon, Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Goodwin and Nelson, and members of the committee:

My name is Jennifer Packer and I am the Chief Nursing Officer for Tuality Healthcare located in Washington County. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you my concerns about House Bill 2697. I am in opposition to House Bill 2697 as currently written.

I have been a registered nurse for 32 years. I have a deep passion for the profession and all that it offers to those who have chosen to serve and for the role we play in our communities. During the course of my 32 years as a registered nurse, I have been fortunate to see a number of changes in health care, not just in the services we offer but in how the services are offered.

When I was a bedside registered nurse, I worked in a very busy Emergency Department that functioned as a trauma center. I understand how challenging the environment can be and how important it is to have enough staff to make sure patients receive the care they deserve, and that staff receive the breaks they need to maintain their work for long shifts, often 12 hours. I understand because that was my reality for many of my years as a registered nurse.

As a nursing leader and someone who has dedicated their career to this profession, I strive to maintain a strong position of advocacy for our staff and patients. I truly believe that to offer the best care we need to advocate for those who are doing the work. I do not believe this bill, as written, addresses the fundamental issues facing frontline nurses and the hospitals and care settings where they work – among those, lack of access to acute care and chronic staffing shortages.

Tuality Healthcare's hospital, Hillsboro Medical Center, is not considered a large hospital. We, on average, have an inpatient census of 90 patients. Over the past three years we have averaged 15% of patients, roughly 14 people, who no longer need to be cared for in the hospital and are awaiting placement in a post-acute care environment. The long delays facing these patients mean we must continue to staff an acute care unit at a ratio of 1 to 4 to serve patients who no longer need the acute care service. It removes capacity from our hospital and strains our nursing staff. Staffing according to acuity, which is in our existing law, ensures that the staff are assigned and caring for patients in a reliably safe manner.

Further, meeting ratios require hospitals to have available staff to hire. At Tuality Healthcare, we would love nothing more than to have no staff vacancies, yet, as we all have seen in the workforce, this is not possible. Despite numerous vacancies and significant effort, like every other health care provider, we struggle to find available trained clinicians.

These are just two issues plaguing a health care system that has been strained past its breaking point for the last several years. We stand ready to work collaboratively to address the numerous issues that impact the dedicated clinicians providing care and the patients who count on them. Addressing just one element, staffing, is not going to solve the underlying problems

and, I fear, could create additional barriers to ensuring high quality, accessible health care for Oregonians.

I know, on this issue and others, no matter whether someone is at the bedside or in hospital administration, our motivation for dedicating ourselves to this work are the same – helping people. We must work together, across divides, to find common ground and a workable solution that sets our clinicians and health care systems up for future success. As written, we do not believe House Bill 2697 does that.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer your questions.

Jennifer Packer, MSN, RN

Chief Nursing Officer

Tuality Healthcare