



House Healthcare Committee
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

February 28, 2023

RE: Opposition to HB2697- Hospital Nurse Staffing

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice-Chair Goodwin, Vice-Chair Nelson, and Members of the Healthcare Committee,

My name is Jennifer Brown, and I am Chief Operating Officer for Cedar Hills Hospital, a 98-bed acute care psychiatric, substance use inpatient and partial hospitalization facility located in Portland, Oregon. Until last month I was our Chief Nursing Officer and tasked with staffing our hospital. The heart of HB 2697 seeks to address the capacity constraints that the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing acuity of patients entering our facilities has placed on all levels of our staff. Hospital work is demanding, and hospital work that involves direct engagement with patients in the throes of a mental health or substance use crisis, even more so. However, the bill as written, is incredibly problematic.

I believe there is a misconception that hospital leadership does not want to hire more staff, this is patently untrue, there are simply not enough qualified staff in the area to fill current openings. Pre pandemic there were challenges to hiring nurses and other medical staff, post pandemic these challenges have only increased. For the last several months, we have been actively recruiting hospital staff at all levels for our facility. However, the workforce in Oregon does not exist to meet our facility needs and the cost to attract and retain new hospital staff is exorbitantly expensive. As such, achieving the nurse and support staff ratios mandated within this legislation, in the timeline provided, has us deeply concerned that we would not be able to keep units within our hospital open until we meet the requirements outlined in this bill.

We are already challenged with having to keep patients longer, well past an acute mental health or substance use addiction crisis and have had to manage their ongoing care in an acute care facility while waiting for exponentially extended periods of time for community or state hospital placement. Requiring additional staff based on prescribed ratios that do not take into consideration the existing needs of our patients, their acuity levels, and organizational system jeopardizes the balance of our system of care. Furthermore:

- HB2697 mandates hospital administrators to pull nursing staff from patient care duties to participate in a staffing committee, which requires shifting the existing patient care

and workload onto other staff. This, in and of itself does not equate to delivering better patient care or outcomes. It creates a staffing nightmare.

- HB2697 mandates participation in a staffing committee that does not appropriately account for all staff utilized on our patient care units. Mental Health Technicians, who provide much needed support and supervision for patients and nurses are not acknowledged, even though they too provide care for complicated patients, that require higher levels of staffing especially within our crisis stabilization unit. Nursing staff, and Mental Health Technician staff that we have on our units are already engaged in direct patient care and do not want to be required to come in on a day off to meet the staffing committee requirements outlined in this legislation. Our staff need that time away to decompress and be with their families.
- HB2697 threatens access to immediate, lifesaving care in every community. Oregon ranks last in the nation in access to mental health and substance use addiction services and simply cannot afford to lose any additional beds based on the staffing requirements outlined within this legislation.
- Mandatory staff ratios double down on the staffing crisis and do not allow the existing care teams the adaptability needed to respond to patient or community needs. Mandatory, “at all times” staffing penalties for non-compliance do not create better access to care.

In closing, we respectfully request your opposition to HB 2697.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Brown, COO
Cedar Hills Hospital