

March 2, 2023

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and members of the Committee, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 523.

I am Eric Swanson, the President of Adventist Health Tillamook, a 25-bed non-profit critical access hospital in Tillamook County. In addition to our hospital, we operate the largest hospital-based ambulance service in the state of Oregon, and ten rural health clinics including urgent care serving 4 other counties outside of Tillamook, as well as a clinic inside the Tillamook County Jail.

I've served as president role since 2019 but I've also been in many other local community roles including 911 director, I am also an Oregon licensed and nationally registered paramedic and previously served as EMS Director, and even served as a police officer and deputy sheriff for 31 years. I've seen firsthand for nearly 40 years how important nurses are in our small county of Tillamook.

As the sole hospital in Tillamook County for 73 years, 50 of those managed by Adventist Health, recruitment and retention of Registered Nurses is difficult. For perspective, Adventist Health Portland's recruitment period for an RN averages about 30 days. Adventist Health Castle, located on the island of Oahu, has an average 45-day recruitment period. In Tillamook, we're averaging about 90 days to recruit an RN.

Staffing right now is bolstered by traveling nurses, which due to their extremely high and unregulated cost to us in total at \$350,000 a month, takes away from urgent needs to invest in infrastructure improvements to our rapidly aging hospital.

We do know training nurses locally at community colleges works. We have found that our best recruiting strategy is to hire and train locally.

We are truly blessed to have Tillamook Bay Community College and our residents who support their continued expansion. We recruit more health care workers from TBCC than any other source. And within the next year, TBCC will have its own associate degree nursing program. This will double the number of RN graduates that we will have the opportunity to retain and employ in our community.

And while this is great improvement, we also need a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. This is essential as nurse leaders and nurse educators require an advanced degree and a BSN is the first step. If we want nurses, we need nurse educators and if we want hospitals, clinics, and other health care centers, we need nurse leaders.

The RN to BSN program would increase access to 4-year nursing degrees across Oregon, including rural communities like Tillamook, and will also allow us to keep our RNs going to school in Oregon.

Simply put, Senate Bill 523 is an investment in the future of sustainable rural health care in Oregon.

My hospital assists with RN to BSN tuition and in the past four (4) years, not one single RN who has applied for our education reimbursement program is attending an Oregon school.

Let's invest in the sustainability of rural health care.

Let's expand opportunities for rural education and communities.

Let's keep the educational dollars in Oregon supporting Oregon Schools.

Let's support Senate Bill 523.

Very truly yours,



Eric Swanson, MBA, FACHE, NRP
President
Adventist Health Tillamook

