



March 2, 2023

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education  
900 Court St NE, S-407  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 523, which would authorize the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to approve Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees at community colleges in Oregon. This bill is critical to improving educational opportunities, addressing local healthcare workforce needs, and providing a more affordable pathway to a BSN for students across the state.

The passage of Senate Bill 3 in 2019 gave community colleges the ability to offer applied baccalaureate degrees (AB) if authorized by HECC. These workforce-oriented degrees are continuations of existing associate degrees, aimed at providing higher-level skills to the existing associate degree program. However, since the nursing industry does not recognize an AB degree, additional statutory language is needed to clarify that HECC may approve a BSN degree at a community college.

A community college option for earning a BSN degree would increase access to 4-year nursing degrees across Oregon, particularly in rural areas. Students with a BSN have more opportunities for promotion and higher pay. Many community college RN graduates are currently paying more expensive out-of-state, online providers to attain a BSN, which is not a viable option for all students. By offering a local community college alternative, students would have a more affordable career pathway and an opportunity to continue their education with familiar faculty, learning environments, and student supports.

Community college BSN programs can also help address the nursing shortage in Oregon by giving more students the credentials they need to continue on to a master's degree, which is required to teach at the RN level. A shortage of nursing educators is one of the key chokepoints in the postsecondary nursing pipeline. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) Future of Nursing Initiative has recommended that hospitals strive to achieve 80% BSN-prepared nurses by 2020, but currently, only 61-62% of Oregon nurses are educated at the BSN level or higher.

Additionally, having a viable local and affordable option for nursing students to obtain credentials and educationally advance is critical to meeting healthcare needs in rural areas, where there are well-documented so-called "healthcare deserts."

Finally, while it is true that clinical space is limited for nursing education programs, most of the bedside training in a hospital or other setting takes place in the first two years for the RN degree. In fact, an RN to BSN program does not require clinical training. All nursing programs that result in RN licensure require master's prepared nurse educators, which means that community college nursing faculty already have the credentials necessary to teach to the BSN.

In summary, I strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 523. This bill would provide better, more equitable opportunities for students, address local healthcare workforce needs, and provide a more affordable pathway to a BSN for students across the state. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Bulger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Bulger, Ph.D.  
President