

Submitter: Gary Heigel
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB60

My name is Gary Heigel and I oppose Senate Bill 60. I have been a licensed Oregon paramedic for 38 years, and an EMS Educator for over 20. Over that time, emergency medicine has evolved, and the knowledge and skills required of paramedics have expanded tremendously. The education and training has also grown and it needs to match if we want our paramedics to be competent and effective providers. As a result of these educational needs, many developed countries outside of the U.S. (Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and more) now require a 4-year bachelor's degree to become licensed as a paramedic. Oregon has long been a leader in EMS education in this country as one of the states that requires at least an associate degree for the paramedic level, and the care provided to our communities reflects that level of excellence. The National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP) has issued position papers identifying the need for INCREASED education for paramedics. Reducing our educational requirements makes no sense!

While EMS staffing (like many professions) is at a near crisis level nationwide, reducing our education requirements in Oregon will not fix that problem. We also have a shortage of physicians and nurses. Are we also proposing that we cut nursing to one year or make medical school 2 years instead of 4-8? Current law only requires a degree at the paramedic level. EMS Providers at the EMT, Advanced EMT, and EMT-Intermediate level can all be licensed and practice in Oregon without a degree.

It appears this bill is an attempt to address staffing challenges in rural areas of the state, which is a significant issue and one that certainly needs to be addressed. However, it is important to also recognize that this change may have a negative impact on the quality of paramedic education across the state. These decisions will impact the education and competency of the paramedics who one day may respond to care for any of us in an emergency. When life and death decisions are being made, Oregon citizens deserve to know that their provider will be well-trained.