

Submitter: Sara Russin  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure: SB60

Hi,

I would like to express my support for Senate Bill 60. Sadly, those of us in Eastern Oregon are usually forgotten about by those who live in the Salem and Portland areas. They do not understand nor do they see the struggles that we face day to day. One of those struggles that they do not see is the lack of hireable paramedics in this side of the state due to the lack of programs and individuals who do not meet the states requirements. Malheur County, which is the second largest county at 9,930 square miles with a population of roughly 37,000 citizens, is covered by only 1 paramedic agency. That agency is staffed by only 2 on-shift crews and 1 on-call crew. Right now, they are struggling with being able to hire paramedics due to the associate degree requirement. But when I heard that agencies just a mile away in Idaho are fully staff and that their reserve EMS programs are nearly fully staffed, I can't help but wonder why Eastern Oregon is struggling the way it is. Then I realize its due to the associate degree requirement. As a resident from a area directly affected by hiring struggles, it scares me and my family.

As a emergency department employee in Ontario that borders Idaho, we routinely have Idaho EMS crews coming to our hospital to drop off patients and pick up patients to bring to them to the Boise area hospitals. You can not see any difference in the level of care provided by the paramedics from Oregon who are required to have a degree verse those from Idaho who are not required to have a degree. Our hospital has sadly been forced to shut down the ICU due to lack of staffing and this has resulted in a increase of interfacility transfers from our emergency department to hospitals a hour away. With our local agency being short staff and unable to hire paramedics with no degree, along with these increased transfers, they are becoming burnt out and exhausted.

I can understand being required to have a associate degree if the required degree was in paramedicine just as nurses must have a degree in nursing or a teacher being required to have a degree in education, but requiring a degree that can be in a unrelated subject just makes no sense. I have heard the argument that basic math is needed in order for paramedics to properly administer medications, yet we trust EMT-Intermediates to administer pain and cardiac drugs with no additional degrees. A degree does not mean a paramedics is going to be top of the line and strive for excellence. A paramedic can still be a "dirtbag" even with a degree. There indeed are numerous Idaho paramedics who have stated that they would like to work in Oregon, however are unable to do so because of the requirements.

Sadly, many people do not see nor do they understand what the rural areas of Eastern Oregon really needs. Those people have not made a 250+ mile round trip 911 call for a semi vs car. They do not live in a area where the closest Oregon paramedic agency is over 70 miles away and just as short staffed. Passing SB 60, even if only the amendment is passed, would greatly benefit Eastern Oregon in a way the rest of the state can not even imagine. By opposing this bill, you are telling the providers in Eastern Oregon you do not care they are understaffed and burnt even though this bill can help. And you are telling the resident of these rural areas that you would rather their medical emergencies be delayed and potentially result in their death than allow competent providers with no degree.