

March 23, 2023

OREGON SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTHCARE

SALEM, OREGON

Re: SB60 2023 Regular Session.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It is my sincere hope that this testimony will be read in front of the committee, read into the record, and fully considered by both the committee and the chambers of the legislature if this bill makes it out of committee.

My name is Jeffrey Birrer (Jeff), my entire family has a long history of service to our communities here in Oregon. I have been an EMT/ Paramedic in this state since 1986, serving communities from my hometowns McMinnville and Ashland, the citizens of Multnomah and Clackamas counties as a 911 responder. I am now serving as a critical care and flight paramedic in southern Oregon.

I am opposed to Senate Bill 60. It is not good for the citizens of our great state. I fully understand that there is a profound shortage of emergency services workers in our states. This is a nation-wide problem and not unique to Oregon. I personally know more providers than I can count on all my digits who have just “walked away” from our profession over the past few years. Eliminating educational and degree requirements will only make the problem worse. It will remove the professional standards your body supported years ago, it will lessen the expectation of knowledge, expertise, compassion and skill we bring in caring for the sick and injured of the state of Oregon. It will diminish the standing of EMS and take us back to the days when your ambulance was also a hearse or tow provider. Where you ended up just depended on how fast the “EMT” drove.

As I am sure you are aware, healthcare in our nation is broken, plain and simple. The issue with Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is that we are viewed as a “non-essential” part of the emergency services (Police, Fire... MEDICAL). It appears that in most cases EMS is viewed as a nicety instead of a necessity, that is the first issue. The second is that EMS is grossly underfunded in our state and the nation. Oregon literally has an unfunded EMS office to oversee the providers and agencies. We have one of the highest certification/ recertification costs for EMTs in the country. We need to fix the funding so that agencies will be able to provide living wages and benefits to the workers who serve as the safety net to our citizens.

I realize I have only discussed “problems”; I would love to work with you on solutions. First, we must address this bad bill, then move onto long term solutions. We cannot sacrifice safety now and hope to reverse course later.

I would ask the following questions:

1. Would you also take away the education requirements for nurses? How about doctors?
2. Would you lessen the requirements on police officers or teachers?

Of course, you wouldn't that would be against everything our state government stands for (service to its people). Remember knowledge is power... in this case it is very possibly the power to save a life. I ask that you vote against SB60 and we work toward a system that works.

Respectfully,

Yours in Service,

Jeffrey T. Birrer

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