



February 14, 2024

To: Senate Committee on Health Care

From: Emerson Hamlin, Political Organizer, Oregon Nurses Association

Re: Support for SB 1594

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). ONA is a professional association and labor union representing over 17,000 nurses and healthcare professionals. Our members work in urban and rural hospitals, clinics, school-based health centers, home health, and county health departments across Oregon.

Our nurses and clinicians consistently report being overwhelmed by the number of patients experiencing mental and behavioral health crises. This is true for our members who provide care in behavioral health-specific settings, such as Unity, but it is also true for our nurses and clinicians working with generalized populations. Our members do their best to serve all patients, but they consistently tell us that there are not enough resources to meet the level of need. Additionally, many share that they feel they lack the tools and knowledge necessary to adequately care for these patients, and emphasize the need for additional behavioral health professionals.

SB 1594 is an important step forward in building robust mental and behavioral health care systems throughout Oregon. It requires employers and workers to collectively develop safety plans, including minimum staffing levels and protocols for addressing safety risks. These adjustments will help keep clinicians safe and reduce burnout. Furthermore, funding for apprenticeships and training programs will provide more students with the knowledge they need to be successful as clinicians. The improvements outlined in SB 1594 are critical for behavioral health care workers, and for our entire healthcare system. Thank you for considering these comments, and please support SB 1594.

Sincerely,

Emerson Hamlin