

Submitter: Lena Hillenburg MD  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2792

RE: Support for HB 2792

To the House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to voice our concerns.

My name is Lena Hillenburg, and I am a palliative care physician who has been working at St. Vincent's Hospital since 2017. I have been dedicated to caring for Oregon's most seriously ill and often dying patients. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I worked at St. Vincent's alongside my physician, nurse practitioner, and nurse colleagues, providing compassionate care under some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. I continue this important work today.

Unfortunately, I must share that I have seen excellent physicians, nurse practitioners, and nurses burn out and leave St. Vincent's—and even medical practice altogether—not just because of the COVID crisis but due to the increasing demands, the lack of value Providence places on its healthcare workers, and our growing concerns about patient safety.

I want to bring to your attention the ongoing strike involving 5,000 nurses and over 100 physicians and other providers at Providence Healthcare. This action was not taken lightly. In fact, it was an act of desperation- a result of Providence's refusing our pleas, for over a year, to address our concerns about patient safety, staffing shortages, and the ability to recruit and retain qualified healthcare professionals. Furthermore, most other local healthcare professionals won't replace striking workers in Providence facilities during this time as they are well aware of the concerns that precipitated this strike.

Right now, Providence continues to stall meaningful negotiations as we enter week 5 of this strike. Providence claims it cannot afford to provide local nurses, nurse practitioners, and doctors with the safe patient-to-staff ratios that we have been asking for. Yet, in a glaring contradiction, they are importing out-of-state workers AND are currently meeting those same ratios we have been asking for while paying exorbitant rates. For instance, Providence is reportedly paying out-of-state nurses \$7,200 per week, plus additional costs for travel, food, and lodging at premium locations like the Hilton.

Temporary doctors and nurses are not familiar with Oregon laws, healthcare practices, or hospital workflows. There have been reports of patient safety concerns in the hospitals due to the heavy reliance on temporary staff. This is an unconscionable practice by Providence, BECAUSE they could have a highly qualified, compassionate, and motivated Oregon based doctors and nurses in the hospital immediately (at a fraction of the cost) if Providence only addressed our ongoing legitimate concerns about patient safety and working conditions.

This approach is a slap in the face to the dedicated local healthcare providers who have served this community through incredibly challenging times. It's also a disservice to patients, whose safety and quality of care are directly impacted by these staffing practices.

This strike is about more than contracts or wages—it's about protecting Oregon's healthcare system and ensuring that patients receive the quality care they deserve. We need your help to hold Providence accountable.

Sincerely,

Lena Hillenburg, MD

Board Certified Physician - Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Hospice and Palliative  
Medicine

Masters Degree in Healthcare Ethics and Legal Policy