

2/12/2025

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2792

To the House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards:

As a nurse, or other healthcare worker, the last thing we want to do is strike. We want to be at the patient's side caring for them and their loved ones. Unfortunately, when we are unable to get what we need from the hospital system to be able to safely and adequately care for patients and ourselves, despite many months of labor negotiations, we are left with no choice but to escalate our fight with the employer to the next level—a strike. As one of the 5000 healthcare workers on strike at Providence facilities around Oregon, I am on strike fighting for safe staffing, better healthcare for healthcare workers, and market competitive wages. Safe staffing that is based on patient acuity and not just numbers is crucial to being able to provide safe patient care. Oregonians deserve safe, excellent care but healthcare workers need appropriate staffing in order to provide this care. Healthcare workers also need access to quality and affordable healthcare in order to care for themselves and their loved ones, so that they can continue to care for patients. Providence recently switched its employees from Providence insurance to Aetna. This has resulted in a large increase in healthcare costs for the employees, decreased access to care as Aetna dictates where we can get care, and innumerable roadblocks to being able to get the care we need. Healthcare workers get sick and injured just like others and we need to be able to access good, affordable healthcare to recover, but under Aetna we find ourselves often unable to obtain this care or having to pay much more out-of-pocket than previous to get that care. We also need market competitive wages so that we can retain and recruit the best staff. Providence has been hemorrhaging employees who are often leaving Providence for better benefits and pay at other facilities. This has further exacerbated the staffing problems at Providence facilities. It also takes a lot of time to orient new employees, which requires more staff and resources. So when there is a high turnover rate and frequent onboarding of new employees, this can further put pressure on overworked employees. As one of the 5000 healthcare workers on strike at Providence facilities across Oregon, these are the things we are fighting for.

We did not take the decision to strike lightly. This has been one of the most difficult decisions of my 18 year nursing career. I, like all healthcare workers, want to be taking care of patients. I became a nurse to help people and want to continue to provide care to my patients and my community. However, despite many months of our union bargaining with Providence to try to get what we need to be able to provide safe and excellent patient care, Providence has been unwilling to step-up for its patients and staff. This left us with no recourse except to strike to continue to fight for the things we need to be able to provide care to Oregonians. Despite being out 5000 experienced caregivers, Providence has

continued to refuse to bargain in good faith. They offered us an insulting tentative agreement that was little changed since before the strike. This tentative agreement was overwhelmingly voted down by the nurses at all 8 Providence hospitals. The result of Providence's refusal to bargain in good faith has been this extended strike.

While its frontline caregivers are put under immense financial, mental, and moral strain while they are out in the cold weather fighting for patient and staff safety, Providence has spent an exorbitant amount of money on replacement workers. Providence also has adequate resources to be able to draw out the strike in an attempt to wait it out in hopes that its caregivers will give in and accept a subpar contract. Providence receives a large sum of public money from taxpayers yet undermines its frontline caregivers by spending many millions of dollars per week on replacement workers, and drawing out the strike. This is money that could instead be used to settle a fair contract and get its experienced caregivers back to work. Oregonians have a right to know where their hard-earned money is going, especially if it is being misspent. This is why I support HB 2792 and strongly urge you to as well. This bill would require hospitals to report the amount of money they spend on advertising, recruiting, and paying replacement workers. During a strike, hospitals tend to blame its striking workers for putting the hospital under financial stress and use this as an excuse to say that they don't have the money to settle fair contracts. With the transparency that HB 2792 offers, it would be made clear just how much money the hospital has to spend on replacement workers and prolonging the strike, instead of using that money on its own staff, and make clear that the striking workers are not placing the hospital under financial strain.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. I look forward to your support.

Respectfully,

Melissa Johnson, BSN, RN, CMSRN, OCN