

COURTNEY NERON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 26



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of SB 24

March 13, 2025

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

Thank you for hearing SB 24. As the State Representative for the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, I want to express my strong support for SB 24, which takes critical steps toward addressing the **chronic understaffing and wage disparities in the Department of Corrections medical system**.

In my visits to Coffee Creek, I have seen firsthand the understaffing and its impact on providers there, and I have heard from the adults in custody (AICs) who wait too long for needed care.

Broadly, Oregon's correctional healthcare system is failing to meet the needs of both its workforce and the AICs it serves. Many AICs enter prison with **complex medical conditions, mental health challenges, and substance use disorders**. The **aging** AIC population, with nearly 1,400 individuals over age 60, further strains an already overwhelmed system. Due to understaffing and outdated processes, routine medical care can take months, with specialist appointments requiring up to six months and off-site travel.

At the heart of this crisis is **DOC's inability to retain medical staff due to non competitive wages**. Unlike hospitals, DOC does not conduct regular fair market wage assessments before bargaining. As a result, DOC-employed nurses are paid up to \$100 per hour less than temporary contracted nurses, exacerbating turnover and forcing permanent staff to continually train and debrief short-term workers. SB 24 corrects this by **mandating a biennial market study** to ensure DOC wages remain competitive with private-sector hospitals and the Oregon State Hospital.

Additionally, SB 24 **establishes minimum staffing ratios** to ensure safer and more effective care. Clinical units will require at least four doctors or certified nurse practitioners, supported by nurses and medical assistants. Coffee Creek Correctional Facility will be guaranteed 2 OB/GYNs and 2 nurse practitioners to provide essential care for its female AIC population. These provisions help **ensure that AICs receive timely care while reducing burnout among DOC healthcare professionals**.

Finally, with recent leadership changes in DOC medical administration and an external review underway, now is the time to prioritize long-term, sustainable solutions. **Addressing short staffing and wage inequities will improve working conditions** for DOC staff and ensure that AICs receive the care they are legally and morally entitled to.

I urge your support for SB 24 to improve our **correctional healthcare system**.

Sincerely,

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