

March 13, 2025

Senator Deb Patterson, Chair

Senator Cedric Hayden, Vice Chair

Senate Health Care Committee

RE: Support SB 24-1

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

My name is Liz Sabin and I have been a RN for the ODOC nearly 20 years. When I was in school, I felt a calling to Public Health. I recall my first experience with corrections. I was a Nursing Student at 20 years old and I was selected to come to Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCCF) just after they opened. I was to be mentored by a nurse for 16 weeks. Her name was Nurse Martin, and I am forever grateful to her for giving me the guidance I needed as a young nursing student. In that rotation is where I found “my calling” many of my college professors had heard referenced in lectures throughout nursing school. Besides all the nursing skills I was able to learn, I knew within the first few weeks that Public Health was the area I’d like to spend a career in. Many aspects of corrections healthcare fascinated me. Some key aspects included: having compassion for the underserved, opportunities to educate people about their health and managing their illness to live fuller lives and providing necessary resources to those that have no place else to go are among the things I found appreciation for.

Besides all the reasons I shared, we also get to see and follow patients through all walks of the healthcare system. Pregnancy, wellness exams, cancer treatments and remissions, pre and post op, skilled nursing, chronic care, infectious diseases, mental health, wound care management, and crisis. You name it; we see it.

So, to say that treating the people in our care is a passion of mine, is definitely an understatement. The majority of the people in our care are siblings, children, parents, spouses, neighbors, and people that could be my coworker someday. I am also a child, wife, mother and sister, and I would want to be treated with care, compassion and respect.

The Adults in Custody (AIC’s) may have become lost in their life for a moment to head down the path of incarceration, but I believe with compassion, care, guidance, education and treating our population with respect, we can help them change their trajectory in life. The care we provide today might be the thing that motivates them to change for good. I also believe that it is a human right to be able to have healthcare regardless of your situation and place and status in life.

Why am I telling you all of this today? I share my story with you because I want you to know that we do care for the people in our care and custody.

I care so much that I am here today pleading with you to help pass SB 24 so that the future in corrections healthcare isn’t what it is today. We have to do better. We must attract and retain staff with the values that myself and many peers and managers share in corrections healthcare.

I must be clear that we are falling short. We are falling so short for the patients and their medical needs. We are also completely falling short for ourselves as professionals. I have never questioned my choice of employment as much as I have in the last 2 years. We are leaving our shifts with our cups completely

empty. We are feeling sick and fatigued from working long shifts with skipped breaks. Some of our own personal relationships are strained at home with our children and significant others.

We experience burnout like the rest of the world of healthcare. Last week I worked three unplanned overtime days in a row to complete my tasks for my post. Two days in that week, I had to scramble to find people to arrange to transport my kiddos because I just couldn't get home in time to be there when they needed me. They are ages 6 and 11. This is a frequent occurrence for many of the nurses, providers and CMA's. The lack of staffing affects me, and it plays a huge toll on my children's lives. Mandated/ unplanned overtime is far too common in our field, but we have a duty to our patients to make sure we provide them essential and mandated healthcare. And I am sure that you are aware that the Oregon Department of Corrections is a mandatory overtime agency, so if we decline overtime, we may face disciplinary actions.

Chronic overtime also affects the quality of care I can provide to my patients. I can't speak for everyone, but I get brain fog around hour 14. Having only 8 hrs. off between shifts when we also must be alert enough to drive home, get to bed, get children up, fed and off to morning care before school, you can see there is little time in the workweek to recharge or fill our cup of personal wellness.

On Thursday night, I had to call my friend who I knew was up and rolled the window down just to stay awake. We are at a point in corrections healthcare where there are days we feel unsafe practicing. The bottom line is that my ability to care for patients rests on my nursing license. And DOC's medical staff are holding our nursing licenses out there, because of improper staffing. People coming into the system are sicker than the general public. Our patient's medical acuity and healthcare needs are on the rise, but we do not have more staff to help alleviate this reality with our increased workload. Since covid, it's been easier to retain contracted healthcare workers than retaining permanent DOC employees. Contractors are employed on twelve-week durations, so they have to be onboarded and off ramped when they get too tired, leaving us to pick up the pieces and soldier on.

At DOC, we do more with less resources every day. Corrections healthcare workers have been forgotten far too long, and it is time that something is done to help protect and defend the important work we do for some of the most vulnerable Oregonians in the system. We need to mandate staffing levels, competitive pay and competitive schedules. We feel with the staffing shortages, turnover and instability in the DOC healthcare system, we need the support for the dash one amendments to SB 24, so that DOC can be a competitive employer for medical professionals who are so highly sought after.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Liz Sabin

President

AFSCME Local # 2376 President