



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1532 A

Oregon Nurses Association

February 15, 2016

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 1532 A. My name is Chris Hewitt and I am here on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association. With over 14,000 members, Oregon Nurses make up the largest portion of Oregon's health care work force—working in almost every health care setting from large hospitals to clinics, school-based health centers, and community-based public health.

This wide range of experience providing patient care in our state has led nurses to the recognition that increasing the minimum wage is both an urgent matter of public health and a critical tool needed for enhancing patient outcomes. Recent studies strongly support this connection, including a recent 2014 report from the Oregon Health Equity Alliance that finds low-income Oregonians between 138 and 200 percent of the poverty line are now twice as likely as higher-income Oregonians to be uninsured. This disparity often results in an increased cost burden for our healthcare system through reliance on Emergency Room visits for care and a lack of access to early treatment for otherwise preventable diseases and conditions.

Mounting evidence also demonstrates that when workers are paid a livable wage, they are both healthier and happier in their lives. A 2014 report from the Minnesota Department of Health on income and health shows that wages strongly correlate to the likelihood of an individual developing serious health problems like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and even premature mortality. Furthermore, the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine published a recent study that connects income as a key predictor in the prevalence of obesity, an increasingly severe health epidemic across our country.

In light of this, it is immensely more challenging for nurses and health providers to achieve quality health outcomes in our communities when many families are not able to meet even their most basic needs. Staff nurses experience the frequent pain of discharging patients they know face long odds getting well due to lack of continued access to care or unstable housing. School nurses bear witness to this connection when caring for children with poor diet and who lack basic medicine for illness or simply a reliable home environment to support their development. And our state's Public Health nurses continue to struggle with the broad impact of low wage trends when working to address and promote the overall health conditions of our region.

The recent Senate vote is a recognition that no matter where you live in Oregon, you can't get by on just over \$19,000 a year. Families in every region of the state are working harder than ever and still struggling just to put food on the table. Our neighbors, relatives and coworkers deserve a livable wage that will better promote overall health and wellness. Oregon's nurses support this plan to increase the minimum wage as a critical step toward achieving this goal and urge your support for SB 1532 A.