



Testimony in Opposition of SB 1049

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Co-Chairs Girod and Holvey and members of the committee,

My name is Teri Mills and I am proud to testify on behalf of nurses across our state who have dedicated their career to public service.

PERS members include thousands of nurses in Oregon, many who work at OHSU, providing specialized care to so many patients. They include our state and county public health nurses who work to help stop the spread of disease, who care for moms and medically fragile children in their homes, and who provide primary care to some of our most vulnerable patients. And they include nurses like myself who work to educate the next generation of RNs in community colleges and universities.

I taught nursing 39 years at Portland Community College, despite the fact that I could have earned a much higher income working as an RN at a hospital. I chose to remain in education because I loved teaching and I knew I was contributing to building the next generation of nurses.

The impact nurse educators and public health nurses have on the health care system is immeasurable. And yet, across the board, nurses in these sectors get paid at least \$10,000 to \$25,000 less a year than our private sector colleagues. A main reason many of my public sector colleagues continue to stay at their workplace is because we were guaranteed a safe and secure retirement. For me, it meant that I was able to retire after decades of work without fear of being unable to pay my mortgage, buy groceries, or pay for my medical care. Every nurse, regardless of where they work, should be able to retire with this level of dignity.

However, SB 1049 does just the opposite. As written, the bill harms nurses' retirement security by adding 12.5% cuts to their individual account program. This is, in essence, a tax on retirement benefits. This is unfair and illegal.

In Oregon, we struggle to recruit and retain nurses to work in public health and education because of the significant pay differential. And it's projected that we will also not be able to meet the demand for nurses as Oregon's population continues to age. But, let's be clear: the severe nursing shortage in Oregon is not due to lack of applicants – it's due to a huge pay differential between faculty and practice settings requiring an advanced degree. SB 1049 only worsens the possibility of recruiting and retaining nurse educators.

The state made a promise to public sector employees for a secure retirement, including pension. And that promise ultimately extends beyond just public employees. The actions you take today on PERS will have a huge ripple effect: on students, on the economy, and ultimately on the health of Oregonians. I urge you to keep the promise you made to nurses like myself, in addition to the students we teach and the patients we help everyday by voting NO on SB 1049.