



# PRESS RELEASE

## OREGON HOUSE DEMOCRATS

For Immediate Release

February 16, 2022

**Press Contact:**  
Hannah Kurowski  
[hannah.kurowski@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:hannah.kurowski@oregonlegislature.gov)

## **House Democrats Join Nursing, Behavioral Health, Education and Childcare Providers to Discuss 2022 Workforce Bills that Will Create and Maintain Jobs for Working Families**

**SALEM, Ore.** - Today, Oregon House Democrats hosted a press conference highlighting their commitment this legislative session to supporting working families and creating an economy that works for everyone. One way we'll do this is by addressing the workforce crisis and providing relief to some of our most critical sectors.

The last two years living through the COVID-19 pandemic have particularly impacted four areas: health care, behavioral health care, child care, and education. As workers face burnout, staffing shortages, and increased levels of demand, Oregon House Democrats are prioritizing immediate investments to help attract, retain, and maintain talent so that Oregonians can receive the care and services they need and climb the economic ladder.

Below is a summary of the legislation that was discussed. Full video of the press conference can be found [here](#).

### **Nursing Workforce** ([House Bill 4003](#))

Nurses are the faces of our health care system. But the many months of living through this pandemic on top of an existing staffing crisis have made this work virtually impossible.

“The trauma of these experiences doesn’t stay within the walls of a hospital,” said **Allison Seymour, a Salem nurse**. “We get into this challenging work because we know we can make a positive difference for people. But we need help.”

House Bill 4003 will increase the scope of emergency licenses, give nurses access to mental health supports, and create more pathways to graduation for student nurses.

“As a state we need to prioritize the safety and wellness of our nurses,” said [Rep. Rachel Prusak](#) (D-West Linn), chair of the House Committee on Health Care. “I had days during the height of the pandemic where I needed support provided by the Oregon Wellness Program. As a nurse practitioner I have access, but we must ensure all types of nurses have access.”

“We’ll continue the work during the interim for a bolder policy in 2023,” [Rep. Travis Nelson](#) (D-Portland), member of the House Committee on Health Care, said. “We need to ensure a long-term ‘nursing workforce pipeline,’ so that our nurses have every opportunity to effectively do their jobs.”

### **Childcare Workforce** ([House Bill 4005](#))

Childcare is too expensive and often inaccessible. Parents, and especially working moms, have had to choose between breaking the bank or leaving the workforce to take care of their children. Additionally, childcare providers often are paid inadequate wages for the essential work they do.

“As a parent, I have experienced the stress and frustration that comes with feeling stuck and financially stretched, as you are unable to fully provide for your family,” said **Rebecca Ellis, a childcare provider in Bend**. “... I’d like to especially thank Rep. Karin Power for her amazing leadership on HB 4005 and the Child Care Emergency Response Package.”

House Bill 4005 will make childcare more affordable for parents and help provide good wages for providers by increasing the rates of ERDC subsidies and capacity building grants. The Child Care Emergency Response Package is a \$100 million investment in capacity building grants for childcare providers to drive down costs for working families.

“We need to build an economy that works for working families,” said [Rep. Karin Power](#) (D-Milwaukie), chair of the House Committee on Early Childhood. “Oregon families are counting on us to help them, and I look forward to ensuring we get these investments over the finish line.”

### **Educator Workforce** ([House Bill 4030](#))

Students learn best when they are learning in healthy, safe classrooms five days a week. House Democrats are committed to ensure the state addresses teacher burnout and support schools to ensure students are in a safe learning environment.

“If I were going to use one word to describe the last couple of years teaching, it would be hopeless,” said **Darnell Williams, a teacher in Happy Valley**. “This is a critical band aid to a gushing wound that is the staffing crisis in public education, and will help us attract and retain essential school staff, from teachers and instructional assistants to school nurses and counselors, so that we can give students the support they need to be successful..”

House Bill 4030 will give state dollars to help districts pay for recruitment and retention bonuses for teachers and staff in critical high-need areas. The bill will also remove unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, allowing teachers with out-of-state licenses

to get licensed in Oregon and funds to help substitute teachers and teaching assistants receive certification. It also creates a statewide jobs and educator portal, so that teachers and classified staff can see where there are job openings, and schools can see what educators are available.

“We need to make sure that teachers, classified staff, and schools have the resources, support, and staffing they need to be successful so that our students can be successful,” said [Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon](#) (D-Woodburn), chair of the House Committee on Education. “When our teachers feel supported, our kids feel supported.”

### **Behavioral Health Workforce ([House Bill 4004](#))**

Many Oregonians are struggling and in need of additional support from mental and behavioral health experts.

“Our frontline workers specially, getting paid the least, endured some of the harshest work conditions,” said **CJ Alicandro, who works with Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare**. “... The very least we can do is see that these workers can get paid a living wage for their consistent underappreciated efforts. That's why I'm happy to speak in support of House Bill 4004.”

House Bill 4004 would ensure behavioral health workers and providers are paid more and improve access to care. It will include a nearly \$200 million investment for staffing, pay raises, retention bonuses and other compensation to support behavioral health care workers.

“This overdue systemic change will help make sure that our essential behavioral health care workers earn wages that support themselves and their families,” said [Rep. Lisa Reynolds](#) (D-Portland), a pediatrician, who serves as vice-chair on the House Committee on Behavioral Health.

###