



OREGON SENATE DEMOCRATS

Salem, Oregon
Oregon State Legislature

PRESS RELEASE

June 23, 2021

CONTACT: Amanda Kraus, 503-986-1074

Amanda.Kraus@oregonlegislature.gov

Oregon Senate Establishes Staffing Requirements for Memory Care and Elevates Long-Term Care Workforce

SALEM – Today the Oregon Senate passed two bills to improve safety and dignity of residents in long-term care, such as memory care facilities.

Senate Bill 703 tackles the ongoing issue of staffing shortages in long-term care facilities through the establishment of a study to identify the cost of care and to seek better strategies to attract and retain a high-quality workforce. The measure also adds a care provider to Oregon’s Quality Metric Council that continuously reviews the safety, quality and performance of Oregon’s long-term care facilities.

Senate Bill 703 makes a critical investment of \$300,000 to DHS in order to study the cost of care, reimbursement rates and compensation for direct care workers.

“Far too many lives were lost as a result of COVID-19 in residential care facilities,” said Senator Deb Patterson (D-Salem) who chairs the Senate Committee on Health Care. “We learned a hard truth, that ‘business as usual’ won’t work, we must change what is considered ‘usual.’ Oregonians should be able to count on the safety and quality of our assisted living and memory care facilities when their loved ones require that specific support. These health care workers have exceptionally challenging responsibilities. Many staff in these facilities, the majority of whom are women and people of color, are paid minimum wage and have few to no benefits, including sick leave. We must find a way to support these workers, which will help them better care for our loved ones.”

Senate Bill 714 appropriates \$1,649,594 to DHS so that the Department can establish and assess an “acuity-based” staffing tool for residential care facilities.

Senate Bill 714 establishes requirements for staffing of memory care facilities. Currently, there is no minimum requirement in state law for the number of staff that must be on duty at a memory care facility. SB 714 requires memory care facilities to adopt acuity-based staffing tools and ensure that there are enough staff on duty to meet all residents’ needs. It also requires the Department of Human Services to ensure memory care facilities are using appropriate staffing tools, keeps those tools up-to-date and staffing to the levels indicated by the tool.

“We’ve heard devastating stories from Oregonians about the suffering that occurs when there is inadequate staffing in a memory care facility. From individuals suffering from starvation because no one was available to help feed them to

those left to sit in soiled clothing and linens for hours on end, the indignities experienced by Oregonians in memory care was simply unacceptable,” said Senator Sara Gelser who introduced SB 714. “These facilities have caring staff that work hard to support their residents. In too many facilities, especially during COVID-19, there simply aren’t enough of these staff to implement care plans, safely transfer residents and meet residents’ basic needs. This creates heartbreak for residents, workers and families and puts the physical wellbeing of residents and staff at significant risk.”

Gelser said that SB 714 will address this issue by establishing clear standards for minimum staffing and by mandating that the Oregon Department of Human Services responds immediately to safety issues, including an immediate assessment of staffing levels.

“We can’t undo the suffering of those who have experienced inadequately staffed facilities in recent years,” said Gelser. “However, SB 714 makes it clear that adequate staffing is a key safety issue and it allocates the resources needed to enforce the new mandate. Residents in memory care, and those who support them, will be safer as a result.”

Senate Bills 703 and 714 passed with bipartisan support and now move to the House of Representatives for consideration.

###