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CONTACT: Rick Osborn (503) 986-1074
rick.osborn@state.or.us

Senate lifts sunset on bill to improve health care access *SB1503 protects patient access to mental health care, preventive services*

SALEM – The Oregon Senate extended access to affordable health care for patients across the state by passing Senate Bill 1503 this morning by a 21-4 vote.

“The need for primary care is just as urgent for Oregon’s aging populations as it was when we passed the original House Bill,” said Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham), who is a public health nurse and chair of the Senate Committee on Health Care. “I am pleased that we could remove the sunset on this law so that patients around the state can continue to have better access to health care.”

The bill makes provisions of 2013 legislation – which requires insurers to reimburse nurse practitioners and physician assistants at the same rate as physicians for providing the same services – permanent. It also prevents insurers from negotiating different rates with physician assistants and nurse practitioners. The law originally was scheduled to end in 2018, but today’s passage of SB 1503 ensures these important pay parity provisions will remain in place.

Oregon’s nurse practitioners and physician assistants fill critical roles in our state’s delivery of primary care and mental health services. In many rural communities it is difficult to recruit physicians to serve residents’ medical needs. This law provides the financial security necessary to encourage qualified nurse practitioners and physician assistants to practice in communities throughout the state; particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas where many Oregonians rely on these providers as their only option for mental health and primary care.

“Many patients in rural communities were unable to access needed primary care services due to a lack of providers,” said Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Portland), who is a family physician and member of the Senate Committee on Health Care. “Continuing this policy of equal pay attracts health care professionals to provide services to rural and underserved communities, where many Oregonians rely on nurse practitioners and physician assistants as their primary health care providers.”

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