

# Getting it Right: Nurse Staffing

*ONA President Lynda Pond, ADN, RN*

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I've advocated for strong nurse staffing standards my entire career. I'm especially proud of ONA's success creating and improving Oregon's Hospital Nurse Staffing Law—the first of its kind in the country.

I was there in 2000 when Sacred Heart Medical Center in Springfield launched the first joint nurse staffing committee in Oregon. Our bargaining unit worked with hospital administration to come to an agreement: our patients would be better served if we worked together. The full agreement was two paragraphs long.

A year later ONA passed the first committee-based nurse staffing legislation in America.

Our hospital administration even supported the bill. How times change!

ONA successfully improved Oregon's staffing law in 2005 and 2015 and we've watched new staffing approaches pass and fail in other states. All the while, nurses in Oregon and across the country keep working to 'get it right'.

It's time for one last push to improve staffing in Oregon.

Join us in a statewide campaign to finally achieve the full potential of Oregon's groundbreaking staffing law.

Let me tell you about our plan.

In solidarity,

*Lynda Pond*

Lynda Pond, ADN, RN

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[www.OregonRN.org/SafeStaffing](http://www.OregonRN.org/SafeStaffing)

# ONA's Nurse Staffing Campaign

Our staffing campaign has three main components, education, enforcement and advocacy. Over the next two years, we will work to improve all three.

## Education

ONA will continue our robust staffing trainings, conferences and online education courses. By 2020, every staff nurse on an ONA nurse staffing committee will have the training and tools available to make the law work for nurses and patients throughout their facility. In addition, a majority of ONA-led staffing committees will meet ONA's effective staffing committee standards.

## Enforcement

Since Oregon's updated staffing law took effect in 2015, every hospital in Oregon has been audited. In 2019, ONA will sit down with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and hospital leaders to review staffing surveys, findings, and the appeals and enforcement processes. We will identify our expectations for timeliness, consistency, professionalism and accountability at every step and determine what actions must be taken to ensure staffing surveys deliver real-world results.

During the 2019 legislative session, we will also prioritize funding for additional OHA investigators and staffing experts to improve OHA's response time to complaints and quickly resolve staffing issues.

## Advocacy

ONA nurses will lead state and federal efforts to improve staffing over the next few years. At our staffing summit in August 2019, members will review the progress we have made in staffing education and enforcement, study the statewide staffing landscape—including how Oregon's staffing law functions in non-ONA facilities—and determine what specific improvements we need to make to Oregon's law.

In addition, we will study options for federal legislation and make a recommendation on a joint federal nurse staffing proposal to raise standards for nurses and patients nationwide.

# Staffing Campaign Timeline:

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## 2019



### **JANUARY - DECEMBER**

Local Staffing Workshops

### **MAY**

ONA – OAHHS Staffing Conference

### **JULY**

Oregon's Legislative Session Ends

### **AUGUST**

ONA Staffing Summit

## 2020



### **AUGUST – FEBRUARY**

ONA Staffing Campaign

### **FEBRUARY**

Oregon's Legislative Session Begins

**SIGN UP TODAY TO JOIN  
ONA'S NURSE STAFFING CAMPAIGN**

[www.OregonRN.org/SafeStaffing](http://www.OregonRN.org/SafeStaffing)

## Local Staffing Workshops

ONA's nurse practice consultants (NPCs) are leading personalized nurse staffing workshops throughout the state to ensure every nurse has the tools and support they need to take charge of their staffing committee, build better staffing plans and make sure they're followed.

Each workshop is customized to meet nurses' needs and includes local staffing plan reviews and interactive roundtables to improve unit and hospital-wide staffing plans on the spot.

Since spring 2018, ONA's NPCs have led successful workshops in Albany, Astoria, Baker City, Coos Bay, Corvallis, Eugene, Medford, Portland, Redmond and Tualatin.

- Find an upcoming staffing workshop in your area at: [www.OregonRN.org/Events](http://www.OregonRN.org/Events)
- Request a staffing workshop for your unit or facility by contacting [Practice@OregonRN.org](mailto:Practice@OregonRN.org).
- Participate in a self-paced online staffing course by logging in to ONA's OCEAN continuing education platform and taking ONA's 4-part staffing education and advocacy training (SEAT). Log in at: [www.OregonRN.org/OnlineCE](http://www.OregonRN.org/OnlineCE)

## ONA-OAHHS Staffing Conference

ONA and the Oregon Association of Hospital and Health Systems (OAHHS) host an annual one-day conference to share research, highlight best practices around staffing and discuss successes and challenges under the law.

This year's conference will be held May 17 in Bend, OR. The conference is free to attend. This year's topics include best practices around meals and breaks coverage, measuring patient acuity and intensity, and an inside look at OHA's survey and plan of corrections processes.

- Learn more about speakers, topics and register to attend online: [www.OAHHS.org/State-/Nurse-Staffing.html](http://www.OAHHS.org/State-/Nurse-Staffing.html)

## Focusing on Enforcement in the 2019 Legislature

ONA is working closely with Governor Kate Brown and her team to improve the administrative rules that guide the Oregon Health Authority's (OHA's) enforcement of Oregon's Hospital Nurse Staffing Law.

By the end of the 2019 legislative session, we believe OHA will have the budget it needs to effectively enforce the law and protect patient care in all Oregon hospitals.

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*On Valentine's Day, 268 ONA nurses delivered a signed petition to Gov. Brown calling on the governor and the OHA to ensure hospitals follow Oregon's staffing law and "increase accountability, establish safe staffing levels and maintain safety for patients and nurses".*

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## 5 Reasons to Attend ONA's Staffing Summit

ONA's staffing summit is the launchpad for our staffing campaign. If you serve on a hospital staffing committee, this summit is for you.

ONA's nurse practice consultants (NPCs) will share the tools we've created to evaluate the effectiveness of staffing committees and the strategies nurses need to change their staffing committee's dynamic to make sure every unit has strong, enforceable staffing plans.

These tools include:

- 1 Field-tested tools for building great staffing plans.**
- 2 Guidelines for effective staffing committee charters.**
- 3 Access to ONA's NPCs for personalized guidance on developing successful staffing plans.**
- 4 Key updates on new OHA interpretive guidance** and how nurses can apply it in their facility.
- 5 Gold-standard contract language** to enhance staffing committees' authority, responsibility and power.

ONA's staffing summit is tentatively scheduled for Friday, August 30 in Portland, OR. If you're inspired to lead the future of staffing in Oregon, plan to be there!

# What Does the Staffing Campaign Look Like?

We are committed to improving every bargaining unit's ability to advocate for effective staffing and safe patient care. In addition to our staffing summit and new tools, every ONA staff member and member leader will prioritize work to support staffing committees for eight months. This involves several ONA initiatives including:

- **Every ONA staff member will receive dedicated training on Oregon's Hospital Nurse Staffing Law** to spread our expertise and ensure we all share a working vocabulary and understanding of the rules and statutes.
- **Each bargaining unit will be asked to 'move' staffing as an issue.** Labor representatives and NPCs will work together with staffing committee members and bargaining unit (BU) leadership to inform every ONA member about the issues their staffing committee is working on.
- **Testing the Oregon Health Authority's enforcement.** Too often we don't seek help from OHA—the state agency charged with enforcing the law—because OHA has historically been ineffective. We will 'call the question' on staffing law enforcement and we are confident OHA will be ready to properly enforce the law and protect patient safety by the time we launch our campaign.
- **Engaging the public in staffing discussions.** It's time to let all Oregonians know what is at stake when hospitals don't staff adequately.
- **Vigorously defending nurses who report staffing violations and concerns.** Oregon's union rights and whistleblower protection laws are some of the strongest in the country. When nurses advocate for patient safety ONA will be there to ensure nurses know their rights and protections so every nurse can confidently challenge poor staffing. When hospitals violate nurses' rights and try to retaliate against nurses, we will fight back and make sure the public knows what hospitals are trying to hide.
- **Creating more member-to-member communications around staffing.** We need new forums to share strategies and successes from staffing campaigns. These forums will allow us to have shared learning spaces to show what is possible and how we can all succeed.

## What if the Staffing Campaign isn't enough?

We are optimistic we can reach a tipping point where the Oregon Hospital Nurse Staffing Law finally becomes an effective standard for all hospitals. But we will also be working to ensure staffing success in two key areas.

- **Aiming for Oregon's Legislative Sessions.** When our nurse staffing campaign is over we will have an extensive evaluation of what is achievable and OHA's role in enforcing the law. It is possible that even our greatest commitment to implementing the current law will not be enough to create widespread success. If our members find that our best effort isn't enough to ensure safe patient care, we would expect to bring new legislative proposals forward in future Oregon legislative sessions.
- **Passing New Federal Staffing Laws.** ONA supports an effort to pass federal nurse staffing legislation that is a hybrid model. It is a version of Oregon's law where nurse committees set staffing standards above pre-determined minimum staffing ratios. The reality is that in non-labor states a minimum ratio can be one of the only powers nurses have to ensure effective staffing and quality patient care. This new hybrid federal design relies on Oregon's law while also using ratios to set a floor for nurse staffing committee discussions.

## What's Happening at the Federal Level?

The AFT and ANA have several overlapping labor union member organizations, which have been working closely together for many years. One of our priorities is to promote federal nurse staffing legislation. ONA, along with the Montana Nurses Association and the Washington State Nurses Association, convened a joint meeting between national leaders and AFT and ANA staff to start aligning nursing organizations around a federal legislative staffing effort.

This work is just beginning, but each organization agrees any federal legislation needs to protect patients in all states, including non-labor states where staffing committees are difficult to establish. Nurses and patients in these states may benefit from a national minimum staffing level based on the typical patient population a unit or hospital serves.

We will explore all options for federal staffing language. Minimums may be part of the solution, but our state and national organizations are committed to the shared goal that ratios can only serve as a starting point. Effective legislation needs to ensure nurses on staffing committees have the power to base staffing on patient acuity and intensity, as well as the specific qualifications of the nurses on duty.

## What's Next?

Be part of this historic push to protect your colleagues, you patients and your practice. Sign up today to be part of our staffing campaign and stay up-to-date on each step of the campaign, from education and enforcement to legislative action.

**[www.OregonRN.org/SafeStaffing](http://www.OregonRN.org/SafeStaffing)**