

Testimony in Support of HB 1724
Washington State House of Representatives

Dear Members of the Washington State House of Representatives,

My name is **Sharmon Figenshaw** and I am here today to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1724, which seeks to improve access to Physicians Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) forms by establishing a registry and the use of alternative evidence.

I have served as Co-Chair for the Washington POLST task force for 25 years. And also sit on the National POLST technology committee

First, I want to thank the members of the House for passing HB 2166 last year. As an earlier version of this bill, your unanimous support of it gave the Dept of Health the funds to start their R&D of a registry. They have an incredible team at work on it, have been working with national leaders and have been asked to present their work at national meetings.

Importance of POLST Forms

POLST forms were developed to meet a specific need for people living with serious illness or frailty who, in concert with their medical provider, wish to limit some kinds of medical intervention in an emergency, like choosing not to be resuscitated. An advance directive is not enough. POLST forms were created to turn a person's wishes for care into orders that can be followed by EMS. They help to ensure that patients receive care that aligns with their values and preferences, even in emergency situations. My colleague will share a couple of stories to highlight this.

Challenges with the Current System

Unfortunately, we see many situations where POLST forms are not with the person/are not located in emergencies when it is most needed. You will hear a story about what can result in patients receiving care that does not align with their values, causing distress for both patients and their families. We are long overdue in Washington for a well-funded and well-staffed system for storing and accessing POLST (Portable Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) and potentially other advance directives, including mental health directives.

Benefits of Establishing a Registry

House Bill 1724 contains many improvements over last years bill. Not only does it direct DOH to establish a POLST registry, greatly improving access to these important documents, the bill includes provisions for electronic signing, verbal confirmations, maintaining security for patient data and providing immunity for providers following the orders.. The technology that DOH has already started work on will ensure that POLST forms are readily available to healthcare providers at any time, protecting patients from receiving care that is not in line with their wishes. The registry will also streamline the process for updating POLST forms, making it easier for

patients and healthcare providers to ensure that the most current information is always available and giving us means for quality improvement across all systems.

Use of Alternative Evidence

It allows DOH to develop guidelines for use of alternative evidence to verify a patient's wishes regarding life-sustaining treatment. Many people want to wear certified jewelry, cards or other evidence, to convey the order that honors their wishes for situations where poor cell/internet may limit registry access to POLST form.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge you to support House Bill 1724. This bill represents an important step forward in respecting and honoring the wishes of patients with serious illnesses. ensuring that they receive care that aligns with their values and preferences.

Thank you for your time and consideration.