

Good Afternoon

My name is Nicole Manchester, I am a nurse and for the last 10 years I have been the Nurse Director of the Pediatric acute care unit and the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at The Barbara Bush Children's Hospital. The Barbara Bush Children's Hospital is the largest children's Hospital in Northern New England and serves the entire state of Maine and bordering towns in New Hampshire. The children's hospital provides care to children with over 26 subspecialties of Pediatrics and has the largest Pediatric Intensive Care Unit caring for the sickest children in our state. Our patients have complex medical conditions and we are able to provide them with top notch care that they would otherwise have to find out of state.

I am here to voice my opposition to LD 1639 which seeks to mandate patient ratios for nurses. In mandating ratios there could be many negative downstream effects. Mandated ratios sound like the perfect solution for better care, unfortunately it has never translated into better outcomes or care as you have heard or will hear today. This is a fact that is born out by data that is nationally collected and readily available. Just this month Maine Medical Center received an "A" from Leapfrog Health care Grades which is a measure of the care we provide, we are already achieving great outcomes.

Where will the nurses needed for these mandated ratios come from? The readily available nurse workforce in Maine is small and even smaller are those nurses with training as a pediatric nurse. There is nothing in this bill that will create more nurses in order to increase our staffing to meet these mandated ratios. As a Pediatrics unit we have been fortunate in the past to have a waiting list of nurses that went into nursing because they wanted to care for kids. We never had open positions but unfortunately we are now suffering the same lack of an available workforce as other hospitals. Currently we supplement our staff with Travel RN's which is not a sustainable model. This Bill is not where our focus should be if what we are looking for is increasing our workforce and providing excellent care. We need to invest in our University and College systems so we can create more nurses.

Access to care is top of mind always when you are the largest Children's Hospital in Maine. So how do we, who are responsible for staffing, operationalize this very rigid Bill? We may be forced to close beds to ensure that we have enough nurses to meet the mandated ratios. And how does that translate to an average family in Maine that is seeking care for their child at our hospital? It may mean they are forced to leave the state to find that care. Many of our patients have complex care needs and receive MaineCare. It is difficult at times to find an out of state option for them, this could further complicate their ability to find care for their child. Anyone with children in the state of Maine should be concerned about the potential effect this Bill will have on Pediatric hospital care. I am asking that you consider the effects this bill will have on our Children's Hospital and oppose these mandated ratios.

This greatly affected us during the respiratory illness season this past winter. The nation experienced a volume of very ill pediatric patients that our workforce was not prepared for. We had to expand our capacity and worked hard to keep staffing ratios where they needed to be which by the way is 1:3 the same as proposed in this bill. We did this by hiring Travel RN's but even then had a hard time finding qualified nurses with Pediatric training. The federal and state governments did not call this an emergency so if this bill was in place there would not have been any ability to adjust our staffing as needed.