

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations Committee, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, members of Health and Human Services Committee, I'm Deirdra Raymond. I am here on my own personal time to speak in support of funding LD 579 as part of the Governor's proposed Supplemental Budget known as LD 2212.

I have been working in psychiatry as a direct care Registered nurse since 1996. I would not benefit from 25/55 because being a single parent, I needed the flexibility of working per diem and contract until my daughter turned 18 this year due to chronic issues she was dealing with. I was full time but with flexibility. So, I don't have much to gain except to put forth what I truly believe in. It seems that nurses working in psych were not included in the amended version of LD 579 biennial budget (only Mental Health workers, which is a different specialty from nurses although just as crucial), which is absolutely shocking. The original bill included nurses that work in psych, and my coworkers and I are asking for you to fix this problem in LD 2212.

The bill as written post amendment only includes the Mental Health Worker ****role**** which specifically refers to entry level or CNA licensed orderlies, which excludes all other direct care staff at DDPC and Riverview, including Nurses, outpatient crisis workers, social workers, and many others who are also subject to the high levels of stress and physical risk inherent to the mental health care field. It's clear based on the testimony provided in support of LD 579 prior to the bill being amended on June 11th that the intention of the bill was not to exclude these roles. Also, the Mental Health Worker role, due to its nature as an entry level role in addition to the high stress level of the work, has a very high turnover rate, and many Mental Health Workers end up using the role as a steppingstone into becoming nurses, and thus lose eligibility for 25/55. This can be clearly seen by the fact that the budgetary estimate for DHHS 25/55 retirement post amendment was just under \$60,000, while the previous estimate less estimates from the other sections would have amounted to over \$5,000,000.

We are on the front lines going out on the floor managing violent, assaultive psychiatric patients trying to keep them, their peers and our peers safe. We have been hit, kicked, spit on, slapped, pushed, accused, called names and insulted mercilessly at times daily during our careers. We have no weapons, just an understanding of how to deal with these situations due to training and experience. We come to work with the knowledge that we may not come out the same way we went in. It is a job that can be thankless and cruel. The level of stress many of us carry does affect our own mental health but because we believe in what we do, we come back every scheduled day.

Please consider 25/55 for nurses working in these positions as well. Nurses who work in these roles provide an absolutely essential and irreplaceable service to our community and deserve to

be rewarded for their time served in such a physically, psychologically, and emotionally demanding field.

Sincerely,

Deirdra Raymond RN,BSN