

Testimony from Janel Crowley, RN, Maine State Nurses Association/National Nurses United in support of LD 2103, “An Act Requiring Hospitals to Adopt Cybersecurity Plans”

Good morning. My name is Janel Crowley and I’ve been a registered nurse for 16 years. I currently work at Maine Medical Center as a NICU nurse and I’m a member of the Maine State Nurses Association. I am testifying in support of LD 2103, as amended by Representative McCabe’s sponsor’s amendment.

Hospitals are increasingly targeted by cyberattacks, like the attacks that affected two Maine hospitals this past year. This bill will help ensure that all Maine hospitals are prepared to defend against cyberattacks and to safely provide patient care if an attack does take down key electronic systems.

My union nurse colleagues in other states faced a particularly severe challenge in 2024 when a cyberattack left Ascension health system hospitals without key electronic systems for a month. That attack took down computers nurses relied on for patient-care basics like ordering food, getting test results, fulfilling and administering prescriptions, paging staff for codes, and charting in electronic health records.

Those hospitals were not prepared. Experienced nurses stepped up to train younger nurses on paper charting on the fly. Basic patient care tasks were hugely impacted. Everything from lab results to pharmacy orders to patient discharges were delayed as nurses picked up the slack created by the down systems, and patients noticed. Despite the chaos, many elective procedures were not cancelled. Communication from management on how to handle basic tasks was inconsistent and changed frequently.

We want to make sure every Maine hospital is prepared for a cyberattack or other emergency that takes down electronic systems. Right now, we are not. My hospital is not doing electronic health records downtime drills or training nurses on the skills needed to care for patients without electronic systems. I don’t know what the plan is if the system goes down.

This bill as amended will require hospitals to consult with workers and our unions to create a plan, so those of us working at the bedside can identify what we need to care for our patients safely. We’ll know in advance how the hospital will manage triage, diversion, cancellation of elective procedures, communication, and anything else necessary to make sure our patients are safe when the computers are down.

Crucially, the bill also requires that all employees who use electronic health record systems for patient care are trained on the skills they need when the systems are down, and that hospitals complete an annual test run on all shifts and units so whenever an emergency happens, we are prepared.

Thank you to Representative McCabe and this committee for addressing this urgent issue. We ask for your support on this bill.