



Stacy Brenner
Senator, District 30

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Testimony of Senator Stacy Brenner in Support of LD 1639, “An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve Patient Care”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
May 4, 2023**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Stacy Brenner. I represent Senate District 30, which includes all of Gorham and most of Scarborough. I am here today to introduce LD 1639, “An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve Patient Care”.

I want to start by telling you a small piece of my story. I went to nursing school and received both my bachelor’s and my master’s degree as a single mom. I’m not unique in the world of nursing. The caregiving professions are full of people, just like me, who lean-in to the commitment of caring for others through dedication and hard work.

In my short time here in the Legislature, there are few bills that I can relate to more than this one.

I remember with clarity the feeling of walking out of the hospital after a 14-hour nursing shift, with a deep and pervasive sense of dread that I forgot to chart something about one of my patients. I remember shifts on the floor when my bladder was so full but there was too much to do and my needs felt secondary to the call bells ringing. I remember times when a meal was a pack of Saltine crackers ripped open and choked down between rooms. Colleagues, I tell you with humility, that being in the Legislature feels like a relaxing hobby in comparison to working as a bedside nurse. The fear of near misses and errors from working over capacity builds a sense of moral injury, one shift at a time.

Somehow, I failed to tell this reality to my daughter. I did not communicate the deep and profound challenge of what it means to be a nurse. I encouraged her to sign up for nursing school and only shared the part of the story that really matters: the value of patient care and the impactful and meaningful interactions that occur when you are given the honor to be the nurse at the birth of new baby or the gift of getting a hungry newborn to latch on and breastfeed successfully. As well as the power of watching the energy shift in the universe when a beloved family member passes away and the joy when a patient is finally discharged after a routine experience turns into something more complex. I only shared the message about the true joy and satisfaction that I felt about my work as a nurse.

However, nursing in Maine is becoming increasingly difficult. The bill in front of you today accomplishes two primary goals: increasing patient safety and encouraging nurse retention. Not



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all of us are going to practice as nurses but at some point in life, we are all either going to be a patient or going to be the loved one of a patient. The care and touch of a knowledgeable and dedicated nurse in those times when you are feeling most vulnerable greatly increases patient satisfaction, dignity, and the overall perception of their hospital experience. This is a bill for everyone. But, most especially, this is a bill for bedside nurses and I hope you will listen with empathy and conviction to their stories as they share them.

In addition to the patients and family members who will share their stories today, there will be opposition. They will tell you that hospitals will close down, go broke, and never find enough nurses to fill necessary positions. They will talk about traveling nurses. They will ask for studies and say they are already working hard to achieve quality care goals. They will also tell you we don't have enough nurses.

But in fact, nurse retention rates increase with safe staffing ratios. Nationally, there are nearly 1 million licensed RNs who aren't working in nursing. Maine has 28,526 nurses licensed in the state of Maine but only 56% of them are working. Maine does not have a shortage of nurses. We have a workplace culture where nurses aren't interested in engaging in the available jobs. Maine has increased the number of nurses graduating with their BSN dramatically over the last few years. The average age of registered nurses in Maine is trending lower. This provides an optimistic outlook if we can protect and maintain the value of an educated workforce through job satisfaction.

There is also compelling data about the effectiveness of safe nurse-patient ratios. Patient outcome data reveals shorter hospital stays and lower infection rates. Studies show that when registered nurses are forced to care for too many patients at one time, patients are at higher risk of preventable medical errors, avoidable complications, falls and injuries, pressure sores, increased length of stay, readmissions, and death. Nurses additionally experience moral distress and moral injury as well as job dissatisfaction when they face situations that pose a threat to the health and safety of their patients. We need to continue providing safe and effective direct care to our patients, and a proven way to do so is to mandate minimum safe staffing levels through this legislation. This bill would also require data collection regarding ratios at Maine's hospitals that will help with future research and permit patients and families to know about the staffing ratio compliance at certain hospitals before choosing to which institution where they'd like to receive care.

I urge you to listen to the testimony of patients and nurses behind me through the lens of being a patient or the loved one of a patient. I hope you will find in the deep well of your conscience the



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value of nursing care and patient safety as you listen to these voices and when you vote on this bill.

Having read the letter submitted by the Department of Health and Human Services, I look forward to working with the Department and the committee to find solutions to their concerns and pass a bill that makes meaningful change.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer questions.