

Good afternoon Senator Tipping and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing.

My name is Amy Strum. I work in the emergency department at Maine Medical Center and I have been a nurse for 33 years. As a nurse of 33 years I consider myself an expert in my profession, and it is in my expert opinion that the time is now to pass the Maine Quality Care Act LD 1639. Unsafe staffing has proven to be a threat to the health and safety of patients in countless ways. We have, thanks to the enactment of the California safe staffing law in 1999, over 20 years to use as an example of how safe staffing saves lives. Over the past 20 years more than 100 studies by academic researchers have produced evidence confirming the link between inadequate hospital nurse to patient staffing ratios and poor patient outcomes, including death.

I know firsthand of the threats to patient safety, and moral distress and injury to nurses that working short staffed causes. On a typical day in a non-critical care area of the emergency department I might have four patients. I also might have five and occasionally six patients. It is a simple and obvious fact that you cannot be in two places at once, but being in the right place, when your patient needs you, or if their condition changes can be critical to their morbidity and mortality. For every patient added to my assignment the percentage that all my patients will have a poor outcome increases significantly. This also increases the likelihood that I will leave the bedside as a nurse because I can't be my patient's advocate and the moral injury this inflicts. Leaving the bedside will increase cost to the hospital as they will be required to pour money and resources into hiring into my position or hire an expensive temporary nurse.

You may hear from those opposing this bill, that there is a nursing shortage, so where will the nurses come from to comply with safe staffing ratios. You also may hear that this so-called nursing shortage is a "pipeline" issue, that there are not enough people choosing nursing, nor educational resources to accommodate them. There are a couple quick statistics that tell the true story however. There are over 1 million licensed registered nurses in this country who are not employed as nurses. Many would return to the profession they love if staffing improved. In Maine there are about 8,000

acute care beds and about 26,000 active license RNs. This is way more than we need to safely staff all hospitals. There is not a nursing shortage. There is a shortage of nurses willing or able to put themselves or their patients at risk. This is directly due to working short staffed.

LD 1639 is good for patients, nurses and hospitals. For all the patients and the profession of nursing I ask you to support this safe staffing bill. Thank you.