



Mayo Hospital
897 W Main Street
Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426

Office 207.564.8401

LD 1639 An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve Patient Care

Testimony in Opposition May 4, 2023

Northern Light Health
Acadia Hospital
AR Gould Hospital
Beacon Health
Blue Hill Hospital
CA Dean Hospital
Eastern Maine Medical Center
Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Brent Watson, and I am here today on behalf of Northern Light Mayo Hospital and Northern Light Health speaking in opposition to this bill.

I am a registered nurse with 22 years of critical care and emergency experience. I am currently the Emergency Department Nursing Director at Northern Light Mayo Hospital. In my role, I am responsible for daily operations and staffing in our rural emergency department.

The Emergency Department at Northern Light Mayo serves a rural area of almost 1400 square miles which makes up a large, populated portion of Piscataquis County. Piscataquis county has one of the oldest patient populations in the state. This demographic increases the incidence of respiratory, cardiovascular, and other system issues. These disease processes require extensive workups and prolonged time in the emergency department.

These prolonged times are also seen in our behavior health patient populations. Any given day we are housing multiple behavioral health patients (adult and children) that require 1:1 observation and prolonged stays secondary to lack of psychiatric bed availability in our state. We have multiple cases where we are housing pediatric crisis patients in our small 9 bed emergency department for months on end until an acceptable safe solution can be found.

Prolonged emergency department stays due to critically ill medical patients and mentally unstable crisis patients greatly impact our ability to serve our community at large. This emergency service could be further compromised if ambulance services are forced to divert to another facility or encounter delayed off-loads secondary to emergency departments trying to meet these proposed ratios. Our concern is that staffing ratios will cause emergency service delays has been proven accurate, based on documented literature out of California. Mandated staffing ratios will further limit access to emergency department care, inpatient care, and disrupt the EMS system in our community.

Our nurses play a vital role in patient care, education, training, and they also participate in a partnership program with Eastern Maine Community College supporting nursing students to complete their education at our hospital.

We work diligently day in day out to provide safe patient assignments based on acuity of our patients. The acuity and the number of patients can vary that from minute to minute in a rural emergency department. Basing assignments off acuity allows for a safer care environment, that is constantly changing. We must maintain the ability to be flexible in an environment that is very unstable in acuity and volume.

Emergency nurses are unique dedicated professionals that are ready at a moment's notice to switch gears to immediately provide life saving measure to whomever or whatever presents at our doors. The teamwork and sense of family that comes with this role is why we can react so quickly to provide optimal care and time sensitive interventions.

One of the cornerstones of emergency medicine is the ability to triage the level of care, this crucial step is performed by the same dedicated nurses. We must triage each moment and make staffing decisions based on patients' acuity in real time. A law mandating nurse to patient staffing ratios will harm patients by limiting access to life saving care until such time that the ratio numbers are right, rather than supporting the clinical judgement of the nurse. This bill takes critical thinking and judgement away. Nurses in our emergency department work as a team identifying the needs of our patients and adjusting patient care assignments as needed for safe care. The ratio law says no to a swift response by our nurses due to ratio requirements, that must be always adhered to. Should we fail to do so, the law then implements a \$10,000 hospital fine per nursing shift. We will be fined, when we make the right patient centered decision and care for our emergency patients.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to this bill.