

Remarks of Sadie Tirrell, RN  
LD 1639 Maine Quality Care Act  
May 4, 2023  
Augusta, Maine

Good afternoon Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Sadie Tirrell. I'm a Registered Nurse and a member of the Maine State Nurses Association. I work in the Float Pool at Maine Medical Center, where we are proud to have just organized our union and won our first union contract. I'm also a nursing educator.

Nurses are the conduit through which the entire patient experience flows. We are capable of this responsibility, and what an honor to get to do it, but we are constantly set up to fail without safe nurse-to-patient ratios. When nurses delegate tasks to ancillary staff, we are still legally responsible for them being done correctly and on time. We monitor for changes in condition and alert the providers to those changes. We coordinate the care team - the case manager, social work, the lab, the pharmacy, interpreter services, and the various teams of physicians that consult on one patient. We all know we can't be in two places at once, and I'm being asked to be in five.

I am here to say unequivocally that without legislation for patient ratios, patient care is not safe, and nurses will not keep participating in it. I'm constantly agonizing over being a part of a system inflicting harm by design, and I feel a moral obligation as a nurse to speak out on behalf of my community.

When I care for a septic patient on antibiotics with dressing changes, a patient with a gastrointestinal bleed, a patient who can't move and has diarrhea and complex buttocks wounds, a patient in a psychiatric crisis, and a patient with dementia who is jumping out of bed and falling if left alone, excellent care that day looks like keeping them all alive. Those patients will not get their medications on time, they will not get turned properly, I will not chart on them thoroughly, and I will not be able to round on them every hour. Imagine the patient you want so badly to hold and keep safe, being so disappointed with the care you can give them that they raise their voice at you and then cry.

After a wretched shift, I go home and sit in silence for hours, my mind racing and feeling like a failure. I cancel my plans with loved ones for the next couple of days because it would hurt them so to see me so different than my typical self and I need total rest. I return to work to try again - determined to provide care I'm proud of, but that quality of care is unachievable. I'm not able to provide care I would deem acceptable for a loved one of mine, and I do not feel comfortable with a loved one of mine being admitted to a hospital while this is the standard of care in our state.

I love my work, and I want to be able to recommend nursing as a career. I am facing an ethical dilemma as a clinical instructor because there is no quality of education that could prepare a

nurse for life at the bedside without ratios. New nurses are making plans to leave the bedside, and I have promised myself I won't stay in my job the way it is for more than a few years.

Nurses are the experts in this conversation and we are here together today empowered by protection from our union. Right now, unsafe inpatient care is the standard in our state. I am here to say loudly that I will not be complicit in that. Please help us provide safe care and please help us make the bedside a sustainable career. Please pass LD 1639, The Maine Quality Care Act.