

Remarks of Emma Cooper, BSN, 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 Emma Cooper. I have been a registered nurse for almost five years. Currently I work on the postpartum unit at Maine Medical Center and am a proud member of our union.

Caring for birthing folks, postpartum parents and their new babies is something I have always held in high regard. My mother is a registered nurse and certified nurse midwife and I am honored to have followed her into the revered profession of nursing. The care that my mother talked about being able to provide feels very different from the realities of my current role. Truth be told, in my almost five years of being a nurse, I have rarely felt proud of the care I was able to give.

The acuity of patients is increasing across all hospital areas and I have observed this directly in the postpartum space. More patients have conditions like pre-eclampsia and gestational hypertension, both are serious, and if not treated and managed are potentially fatal. I also have the honor to care for new Mainers, many of whom do not speak English and require interpreters. I am taking care of infants that require more advanced nursing care initiatives like blood sugar checks every three hours or frequent vitals for the duration of their stay. All of this takes more time.

We are already failing parents in this country on so many levels and I often feel that I am failing them personally. On any given shift a postpartum nurse will likely have three parent-to-child couplets to take care of, so six patients in all. Everyone's baby feeds at least every two to three hours and more often than not feeding is not the easy image we all want to see. Many of my patients (both parent and baby) need help with several feeding sessions in a row until things click, I rarely have time to provide this due to the number of patients I am being assigned.

You will hear the opposition state that mandated ratios reduce nurse autonomy over patient assignments and care. As a floor nurse I have never once been asked if I thought my assignment was appropriate and I know that my charge nurses do not control this either. This is dictated by administrators not staff nurses. This bill would only serve to increase nurse autonomy over patient care.

The continuous moral injury to nurses as a result of these conditions is devastating. Nurses are leaving inpatient care settings in droves because we no longer want to be subjected to the gruesome moral injury being inflicted upon us by our employers. Hospitals like to say that this is because there is a nursing shortage. This is categorically false. There is no nursing shortage, just a shortage of jobs that we nurses feel safe working in.

I am so tired of hospitals and big health corporations dominating the conversation on what nurses need. Especially when the people who run them have never worked a day at the bedside or have not worked there in years. If hospitals are truly concerned with "helping to create the healthiest communities in America," they would support patients over profit and staff over technology.

We need legislatively mandated nurse-to-patient ratios. We are the most trusted profession in America and we are asking you to trust us now, nurses know best what we need. Please support nurses and help us help our patients. Please vote in support of LD 1639 The Maine Quality Care Act. Thank you for your time.

Emma Cooper, BSN, RN