

Oral Testimony – Erin Oberson, RN

SUPPORT LD 2106

Good afternoon. My name is Erin Oberson. I am a registered nurse and proud member of the Maine State Nurses Association. I live in Old Town and work at Eastern Maine Medical Center in Labor & Delivery.

Nursing is a profession I am proud to represent in large part because of a simple promise we all make: to care for people when they are most vulnerable, without judgement, without fear, without harm, regardless of where you were born or how you got here. The presence of ICE in or around healthcare settings directly violates that oath and puts nurses, patients, and entire communities in danger.

When ICE operates in and around healthcare facilities or targets people seeking care, patients stop coming. People delay treatment, avoid important follow up appointments, and leave before care is complete because they are afraid. This results in worse outcomes, more preventable emergencies, avoidable harm, higher costs for all of us. We are at the beginning of yet another public health crisis and once again nurses are at the frontline.

Nurses must never be positioned to feel like extensions of ICE. We are not trained or obligated to participate in immigration enforcement and being made to do so in our workplaces is a danger to our safety as well as our patients and co-workers. ICE activity in hospitals forces nurses into impossible situations where our ethical duty to protect our patients and fellow workers conflicts with enforcement actions. Potential adverse reactions include escalation of tension, increased rates of workplace violence, exacerbation of trauma, and erosion of trust in public institutions.

LD 2106 is necessary because, to be frank, getting kidnapped absolutely cannot be an acceptable side effect of needing healthcare or going to work caring for others.

This May marks 25 years since I graduated nursing school. I've seen a lot of things and I've sure felt a lot ways in my nearly two and half decades at patients' bedsides. I've certainly questioned my career choice a time or two. I'm fortunate to have never felt sustained fear, anguish, helplessness, and distress for my patients and community. Until now. That's what I feel since ICE has come to Maine.

Representative Sato, thank you for introducing this bill. I ask all of you for your support of this important legislation.