



National Nurses  
Organizing  
Committee



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## **Testimony of Maine State Nurses Association President Cokie Giles, RN in Support of L.D. 1436, "An Act To Protect Certain Essential Workers from Infectious Disease"**

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor & Housing.

My name is Cokie Giles. I am a registered nurse at Eastern Maine Medical Center. I'm also the President of the Maine State Nurses Association. **As of the election results yesterday at Maine Medical Center, our union now represents four thousand nurses and caregivers from Portland to Presque Isle.** We are the largest union of registered nurses and healthcare workers in the state of Maine.

It was just one year ago March when Eastern Maine Medical Center told us that nurses would NOT be provided N95 respirators while caring for all COVID positive patients. Can you imagine that? The second-largest hospital in the state of Maine denied life-saving equipment to those who needed it most, at the beginning a war with a virus that we did not yet understand.

The reason they gave us was that supplies were low and that they did not have enough N-95s on hand to protect us nurses. We were being sent in to battle without the proper protection. And the exact results we predicted came true: unprotected nurses got sick with COVID-19. Fortunately, all of our nurses recovered. But they might not have. Their young children and their spouses could very well have been robbed of that person in their lives forever, just because our employer was not prepared to protect them while these nurses protected the rest of us.

Now, way back in January of 2020, our union contacted each employer where MSNA has members to make sure that there was enough PPE to protect everyone as COVID-19 quietly spread throughout our state. And each employer replied that they had plenty.

Just two months later, every single one of these hospitals and healthcare agencies was rationing their N-95s because it turned out they didn't have enough, denying protection to the front-line workers fighting back against COVID-19.

I'm grateful that our union had the foresight to get the information it could before COVID really hit. But mere verbal assurances from our employers was clearly not enough. And when the next pandemic comes, you better believe we'll get more words of assurance again. And the same thing will happen: there won't be enough PPE, it will be rationed, and nurses will get sick and maybe die. Unless you do something right now to make sure that doesn't happen. Please pass LD 1436. Thank you