

My name is Jillian Sternberg and I have been a nurse for almost 10 years. I have been employed at Maine Medical Center for the past 3.5 years on R5, a 38-bed med-surg tele floor specializing in Urology and Nephrology patients. We also hold the distinction of being part of the only transplant program in Maine. In my position as a Clinical Nurse Coordinator, I work both as a bedside RN with a direct patient-care assignment as well as a charge RN. I know and understand the complex challenges both nurses and hospitals are facing regarding safe staffing ratios and appreciate the support from our representatives in government as they attempt to remedy the situation. However, I do feel the proposed ratios will have a negative impact on the health of my community, and for this reason, I have chosen to speak out against this proposal.

I am concerned with the impact staffing ratios being proposed in this bill will have on Maine residents and visitors seeking care for acute health care needs. At Maine Medical Center, on any given day, the Emergency Department can have over 100 patients, often with boarders awaiting placement on inpatient units. With the mandated staffing ratios and the current shortage of nurses in our state, the facility may be forced to close beds, which will decrease access to care and increase patient waiting times. Patients requiring a higher level of care at a smaller hospital may be forced to wait days for bed availability. Delaying care for those acutely ill will have a drastic impact on those most vulnerable in the community.

If the proposed mandate passes, it will take away the flexibility currently afforded to units when determining patient assignments. The ability to flex nurse ratios based on acuity and experience to best meet individual patient needs is essential to providing safe, quality care. The proposed mandate also approaches staffing ratios as a "one size fits all" solution, not considering the differences in the level of acuity and care provided at a smaller hospital versus a level 1 trauma center.

I implore you to rethink the mandated ratios in this proposal and the impact it will have on our community. Let us focus instead on the current issues weighing down hospitals and nurses, such as the nursing shortage and lack of degree programs within the state, shortfalls in long-term care and mental health care, and workplace violence. This mandate is not a solution but a catalyst for challenges to providing care in an already fractured system.