



Health Professionals and Allied Employees

Debbie White, RN, BSN – HPAE President
Barbara Rosen, RN, BSN – HPAE First Vice-President
Alexis Rean-Walker, BS – HPAE Secretary-Treasurer
Chris Whalen – HPAE Executive Director

Testimony of

Debbie White, RN, President

In favor of S.304, which establishes minimum registered professional nurse staffing standards for hospitals and ambulatory surgery facilities and certain DHS facilities.

NJ Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Thursday, January 4, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Vitale and the members of the Senate Health Committee, for scheduling this hearing. I am Debbie White; I'm an RN of thirty-five years and the President of HPAE, the largest healthcare union in New Jersey.

We are facing a staffing crisis in our hospitals. But there is a clear, simple and proven answer- Safe staffing legislation.

Senators, we have a retention problem in our hospitals. We can't retain nurses or any front-line staff. Why? According to the survey HPAE conducted a year ago, the number one reason nurses are leaving is unsafe staffing. The second is burnout and stress, also due to unsafe staffing.¹

Recruitment efforts are needed, yes, but recruitment alone cannot fix this problem. We must address retention. Otherwise, it's as if we are trying to fill a bucket full of holes with water. We pour new nurses in, but they leave once they realize how unsafe it is. Thus, hospitals are simply revolving doors for nurses.

This staffing crisis did not start with the pandemic, although that was the straw that broke the camel's back. No, it goes much further, back to the corporatization of healthcare. Whether For-Profit or Non-profit, most hospitals have become large healthcare corporations whose priority is to make money. Healthcare corporations' profit from our sick.

And the pandemic did little financial harm to hospitals.

Based on reports prepared by the NJHCFFA, we know that through the first six months of 2023, at least 75% of New Jersey hospitals had positive profit margins. Further, 25%

¹ "CODE Red. Understaffed. Overworked. Unsafe for everyone. HPAE Position Paper, March 2023.

https://www.hpae.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HPAE-CODE-RED-White-Paper_3_2023_v3FINAL.pdf

of New Jersey hospitals generated profit margins in excess of 9 percent.² One would think hospitals would then reinvest their profits to increase staffing, because it's what patients need. Instead – and this has gone on for decades – nursing care is simply a line item in a budget, that can be cut to its lowest number to maximize profits.

Unfortunately, this is what we can always expect hospitals to do.

So, we need New Jersey's policy makers to take a stand and pass laws to mandate safe staffing.

Here's what the research shows over the past 20 years:

For patients: Safe staffing: Decreases deaths, decreases injuries, decreases negative outcomes like hospital acquired infections, bed sores and med errors, it increases patient satisfaction—because patients actually have an available nurse.

For nurses: Safe staffing slows the endless migration of nurses out of hospitals. It increases job satisfaction and decreases burn out and injuries.

For hospitals: Research shows that Safe Staffing is cost effective. (Better outcomes for patients equals better reimbursement.) And Safe Staffing decreases costs associated with constant turnover of staff.

So "Safe Staffing also Saves money."

We are greatly encouraged by the success in other States –California, Oregon, NY and Connecticut to pass this legislation. And we know that in Pennsylvania, the bill is half-way there. We are encouraged by this hearing. We hope you read the research. It is clear safe staffing benefits everyone.

Thank you.

² NJ Health Care Facilities Financing Authority, Apollo Statewide Median.
<https://www.nj.gov/njhcffa/what/reports2.html>