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NURSES FROM ACROSS PA SPEAK OUT DURING NURSES WEEK ABOUT THE STAFFING CRISIS AND EPIDEMIC OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN PA HOSPITALS

Nurses Deliver Signatures from Tens of Thousands of Pennsylvanians Urging Senators to Prioritize Safe Nurse-to-Patient Staffing Ratios in Pennsylvania and Pass the Patient Safety Act

Harrisburg, PA - Frontline caregivers in Pennsylvania have long faced a pair of critical challenges in our hospitals – unsafe staffing and workplace violence. For decades, hospitals have understaffed nurses as a strategy to enhance profits, and nurses and other healthcare workers have long experienced workplace violence at rates exponentially higher than workers in other sectors. However, the pandemic has greatly exacerbated both challenges and precipitated the hemorrhaging of healthcare workers from hospitals across the nation.

We are now in a full-blown crisis, one that affects the quality of bedside care for all Pennsylvanians and the health and safety of frontline healthcare workers across the Commonwealth.

Today, during Nurses Week 2024, nurses across PA gathered at the Capitol to speak out about these critical challenges and: 1) urge PA Senators to act on the Patient Safety Act (HB106) – a bill that seeks to enact minimum safe staffing standards in every hospital in the commonwealth for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians – and 2) urge members of the House Labor & Industry Committee to pass HB2247, a bill that would establish violence prevention committees mandated to conduct risk assessments and develop robust violence prevention programs in every health facility in Pennsylvania.

“These issues are, unfortunately, linked,” said longtime Temple University Hospital Neonatal ICU Nurse Maureen May, R.N., president of the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP). “Spikes in aggression and violent behavior from patients and patients’ families occur more frequently when they are frustrated that they or their loved ones aren’t getting prompt or focused attention due to poor staffing.”

May thanked members of the House Labor & Industry Committee for seeking input from bedside nurses in addition to hospital administrators and nurse managers. “We know what happens at the bedside,” she says. “We are the people who are actually there.” The Committee listened – and passed HB2247 through to the House Floor in a party-line vote.

The Patient Safety Act – HB106 – passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support last June. At the time, state Rep. Tom Mehaffie, the bill’s Prime Sponsor, said: “Today, we plugged the leaks in the bucket and listened to what our bedside nurses tell us they need to care for us.”

Unfortunately, that proverbial bucket is still leaking profusely, and the bill has yet to receive any legislative action in the Senate. So today, every major nursing organization in the commonwealth, representing more than 100,000 RNs – union and nonunion – urged PA Senators to act on the bill as the answer – the *only* answer – to the current nurse staffing crisis that is driving down the number of RNs willing to work at the bedside and depressing the quality of patient care across Pennsylvania.

“Nurse staffing ratios are more than just numbers on spreadsheets,” said Davey Scher, R.N., a non-union nurse with extensive clinical experience in emergency and critical care nursing, speaking on behalf of the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association, where he is chair of the Government Relations Committee. “They are critically important, because they connect patient safety and quality of care.”

“Picture a bustling hospital emergency department overflowing with patients requiring varying degrees of care,” he said. “The nurses are short-staffed and stretched impossibly thin, navigating the demands of multiple patients concurrently. Under these conditions, which are chronic these days, it isn’t possible to provide the level of care our patients require and that we are trained to and want to give. Now, imagine that you are the patient.”

“We have to stop putting nurses and patients in these situations,” said Jaime Balsamo, R.N., a 16-year veteran at UPMC Altoona. “We need to give nurses the support and resources we need to do our jobs to the best of our abilities to provide the care our patients deserve. That’s why we need the Patient Safety Act, and real nurse- to-patient staffing ratios, and it’s why SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania together with PASNAP has collected over 22,000 signatures in support of these ratios. We know giving patients more time and attention would lead to better outcomes and help retain nurses in our hospitals.

The nurses presented PA Senators and Gov. Shapiro with the signatures of 22,000 Pennsylvanians, most of them bedside nurses, urging our elected representatives to prioritize patient safety in the commonwealth and act on the Patient Safety Act for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians.

“We need to ensure that here in Pennsylvania, we spend our healthcare resources on what matters most, and that’s patient care,” said Balsamo. “During Nurses Week, we need more than talk. We need action to ensure safe staffing in our hospitals.”

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The Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP), SEIU Healthcare PA, the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association (PSNA), JNESO, PSEA, AFSCME, and Nurses of Pennsylvania have united in their support of the Patient Safety Act (HB106) because patients deserve the same high standard of care no matter where they seek medical attention, whether it’s in a large urban medical center or a small facility in a rural area.