

# Pennsylvania Patients, Hospitals, and Nurses Need **THE PATIENT SAFETY ACT**

Pennsylvania is facing a crisis in healthcare. Unprecedented levels of short-staffing are leading nurses to leave the profession in record numbers and patients are suffering. We must address the conditions that drive caregiver burnout, trauma, and turnover, and improve care **by passing the Patient Safety Act into law now.**

## **Safe Staffing Saves Lives & Improves Patient Outcomes**

- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would save the life of 1 in 10 surgical patients.** Each year, over 300 hospital patients in PA die as a direct result of inadequate and unsafe staffing. Research shows that each patient a nurse is assigned beyond a safe limit increases the risk of death for that patient by 7%. Nurses in PA regularly report having 2-6 patients over that safe threshold, increasing risk of death by 14 to 42%.
- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would reduce falls, injuries, and medical errors;** reduce in-hospital heart attacks and respiratory failure; reduce cases of “failure to rescue” when something goes really wrong; reduce infections and bedsores; and reduce readmissions (patients going back to the hospital for the same or related care within 3 months of discharge.)
- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would reduce emergency room wait times.** Research has shown that a 25% increase in the amount of patients assigned to emergency department nurses can result in a 100% increase in wait times.

## **Safe Staffing Saves Hospitals Money & Improves Retention**

- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would save hospitals money.** A national study found that the financial benefits of increasing nurse staffing offset the cost of those additional staff. A University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing study in 2021 concluded: “In addition to better quality of care and patient outcomes, the savings due to fewer readmissions and shorter lengths of stay in hospitals was about \$70 million, more than twice the cost of the additional nurse staffing.”
- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would offset the cost to hospitals of poor patient outcomes.** Falls, injuries, medical errors, heart attacks, respiratory failure, infections, bedsores, and readmissions are all very expensive. The benefits of safe staffing (healthier patients, shorter hospital stays, and fewer readmissions) address those lost reimbursements that are costing PA hospitals millions each year.
- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would improve retention and offset the high cost of caregiver turnover.** In PA hospitals, the average cost to replace a single burned-out nurse is over \$82,000. On average, each hospital is estimated to lose \$300,000 per year for each percentage point of nurse turnover at their facility.

## Safe Staffing Solves the Healthcare Workforce Crisis

- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would address the primary reason nurses are leaving.** Even before the pandemic, the General Assembly's Joint State Government Commission on Pennsylvania's Health Care Workforce Needs concluded in 2019 that as many as 30% to 50% of newly licensed Registered Nurses leave the bedside within their first 3 years. Nurses overwhelmingly cite staffing as the issue driving them away from Pennsylvania hospitals. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health's "Pulse of Pennsylvania's Registered Nurse Workforce," unsafe staffing is the single greatest source of job dissatisfaction among nurses.
- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would improve nurse recruitment.** California solved their nurse workforce crisis by implementing safe staffing standards in the law. The state was facing a nursing shortage, but after implementing safe staffing standards in 2004, the shortage gradually but consistently disappeared by 2013 and the state has enjoyed a nurse surplus since then.
- **Passing the Patient Safety Act would improve nurse retention.** Analysis of Pennsylvania hospitals shows a strong correlation between staffing levels and job satisfaction. Across the board, heavier patient loads result in higher nurse burnout,

**The solution is clear: Pass the Patient Safety Act to fix the nurse workforce crisis, save hospitals money, and save lives.**

The Patient Safety Act would establish safe staffing standards for all PA hospitals, implemented by each hospital in collaboration with feedback from caregivers, and according to the acuity and needs of their patients.

## PLUS

### Nurse Staffing Committee

Each hospital must establish a nurse staffing committee of 50% managers and 50% RN direct-care staff and have a co-chair from each. The committee must develop a written, hospital-wide nurse staffing plan with the primary goal of ensuring that the hospital is staffed to meet the healthcare needs of patients and each unique hospital.

### Right to Issue Penalties

The DOH is empowered to impose civil penalties for a violation of any provision listed in the bill.

### Staffing Plans

Each hospital must submit to the DOH a written hospital-wide staffing plan for nursing services that meets the required ratios and the unique staffing needs of the hospital. The nurse staffing committee must review the staffing plan at least once a year.

### Safe Harbor

Both bills include protections for nurses and a process by which nurses may report unsafe assignments over the mandated ratios to the DOH

*"This legislation is an important part of keeping hospital patients safe and ensuring they receive the best care possible. In addition, the Patient Safety Act represents an excellent way for hospitals to make an investment in patient care that will pay dividends in overall savings."*

—From the introductory memorandum attached to both bills