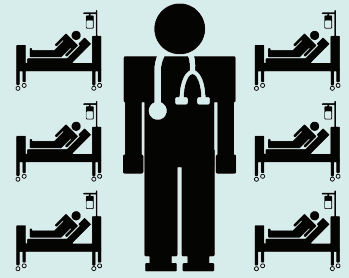


Healthcare Staffing Standards



Keeping Washington Safe and Healthy (SB 5236) – During the worst months of the pandemic, exhausted health care workers put their own health and safety on the line to keep us safe. While many aspects of our lives have returned to normal, the day-to-day demands for nurses and other health care workers are still unbearable. These circumstances put patient safety at risk as health care workers struggle to manage unsafe patient loads and working conditions. Patients need timely access to quality health care, but under current circumstances, our health care system is failing too many of them.

The Legislature should approve SB 5236 to establish and enforce safe staffing standards for the health and safety of everyone in Washington. Safe staffing standards would protect health care workers from being assigned dangerously high patient loads, and provide oversight to make sure that hospital executives hire enough staff to ensure patient and worker safety.

A System in Crisis – The pandemic highlighted cracks in our health care system, as pre-existing recruitment and retention challenges and unsafe work standards have pushed health care workers and facilities to the point of crisis. This not only creates poor working conditions for health care workers—pushing many to a breaking point so they leave the profession—it also puts patients at increased risk for injury or even death.

Health care workers have asked hospital executives to make work conditions safer and more manageable, but their requests have been left unmet. Now not only are we losing existing, experienced workers, but we also face increased costs for traveling nurses and less capacity to train and keep new entrants to the field. This is creating a perpetual cycle that compounds the workforce shortages and unsafe work conditions.

Setting Safe Staffing Standards – Lawmakers can address the staffing crisis. WA Safe & Healthy requests the legislature:

- PASS SAFE STAFFING STANDARDS to protect health care workers from dangerously high patient loads, ensuring



“I work in health care because every day is different. I like taking care of people, especially in their most vulnerable moments. But nurses are dropping left and right and we aren’t getting new staff to replace them. Before COVID, staffing was always an issue, but now it’s even worse. I’m worried about my patients, and I don’t see this getting better unless the whole healthcare system changes.”

— Rhonda, RN, Everett

worker and patient safety, and establish adequate enforcement to ensure the standards are followed. Local hospital staffing committees need to be improved to help address individual hospital approaches.

- ENFORCE EXISTING OVERTIME AND MEAL BREAKS AND REST BREAKS laws and close loopholes to ensure our healthcare workers are getting critical break time and ending the abuse of mandatory overtime so a safe health care environment can be maintained for patients.

Similar standards have been established in other states with positive results. Healthcare workers in those states report better safety and better care for patients, and better nurse staffing levels are directly associated with reduced burnout, fewer patient deaths and better patient outcomes.

We need the Legislature to set safe staffing standards to ensure health care workers can do their jobs safely and give patients the care they deserve, for the health and safety of everyone in Washington.



2023 Legislative Priorities of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

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