



MASSACHUSETTS AFL-CIO

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**Testimony of Steven A. Tolman, President of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO
To the Health Policy Commission
October 16 & 17, 2018
In Support of Question 1**

I wish to register the support of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO for Question 1 because it will dramatically improve patient safety in Massachusetts' hospitals by setting a safe maximum limit on the number of patients assigned to a nurse at one time, while providing flexibility to adjust nurses' patient assignments based on specific patient needs. When nurses are spread too thin, care suffers and bad things can happen.

Today in Massachusetts hospitals, there is no law and no limit to the number of patients that can be assigned to a nurse at one time (aside from the Intensive Care Unit). Because of this, patient care is deteriorating and leading to more complications, preventable readmissions, and medical errors, as well as longer hospital stays and real life-threatening risks.

Nurses say patient care is being compromised when they have too many patients. 77% of RNs report that they are assigned too many patients to care for at one time. Dozens of independent scientific studies have consistently found that the quality of care decreases dramatically when nurses are forced to care for too many patients at once, putting patients at increased risk for complications like pneumonia, bedsores, infections and more.

Front-line, bedside nurses are highly trusted and this is a profession that people respect and hold in the highest regard. They have been signaling to us for years that this is a problem. That they are being forced to care for too many patients at one time – that the care they have been trained and licensed to provide that cannot provide. We need to listen to them. We need to trust them and support them so that they can provide safe, quality care for the patients who are our loved ones.

Spreading nurses too thin with too many patients to care for at one time is the dirty little secret of the hospital industry. Sure, people come from all over the world to have that innovative, cutting edge procedure. But today you are only admitted to the hospital if you need 24-hour round the clock nursing care – proper assessment and surveillance of your condition. Hospital executives have had endless time and countless opportunities to fix this problem but at every turn their answer is no.

The respected, trusted profession of the nurses on the front-line are telling us they cant provide the care you should be getting because they have too many patients at one time. The research

shows us unequivocally shows us the impact of the nurses' patient assignments on quality of care.

Massachusetts is well-positioned to have safe patient limits. Hospitals can afford to invest in better patient care. This is a \$28 billion hospital industry that recorded \$7.6 billion in profits in the last 5 years. And Massachusetts has more nurses (per capita) than nearly every state in the nation. We are one of just two states with no nursing shortage and a projected surplus through 2030.

Question 1 is supported by a broad coalition from across Massachusetts, including registered nurses, patients and family members, health and safety organizations, community groups, unions and elected officials.

Safe patient limits ensure better patient outcomes, lower healthcare costs and higher quality of care.