STATE ADVOCACY ALERT

Nurse Staffing Ratios: Meet Your Legislators During Legislative Spring Break

Thanks to the outstanding engagement and advocacy of members in opposing mandatory nurse staffing ratios, the Illinois House this morning adjourned for its two-week spring break without taking a vote on House Bill 2604. Members sent more than 3,800 emails to legislators, filed more than 1,600 electronic witness slips and made numerous telephone calls. We greatly appreciate your response to our many calls to action on this critical issue.

However, we do not believe this issue is over, and we must utilize the next two weeks to meet with lawmakers in their districts. Lawmakers need to hear from their hospitals and their nurses on this issue. That means we must keep up the pressure to oppose HB2604 (or any other mandatory nurse staffing ratios proposal that might be introduced in the final month of the legislative session).

ACTION REQUESTED: Meet with your state Representative and Senator when they are home in their districts over the next two weeks. Tell them why mandatory nurse staffing ratios are harmful for patients, hospitals and healthcare and urge them to vote No or Present on House Bill 2604 – or any other legislative proposal on mandatory nurse staffing ratios. Even if you have called or emailed your Representative and Senator previously, it is critical that you meet with them during the break.

To look up your Representative and Senator and their local district office information, click here (fill in the zip code box under “Find Politicians/Look Up and Contact Your Officials” in the right hand column or near the bottom of the webpage).

IHA has developed several fact sheets that you can use with your legislators:

- Fact Sheet (includes a list of organizations opposing nurse staffing ratios)
- Studies: Nurse Staffing Ratios Do Not Improve Outcomes
- Comparing Illinois and California on Quality
- Illinois: Higher RN Staffing Levels than California and U.S.
- Nurse Staffing Based on Each Patient's Condition and Care Needs

Also, if you have not yet sent a letter to the editor or opinion piece to your local newspaper, here are two sample letters/op-eds that you can customize and use with your local media:

- Sample Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed from your Nurses
- Sample Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed from your Hospital's CEO/Leaders

Suggested points for talking to your state Representative and Senator:

- I urge you to vote NO or Present on House Bill 2604 – or any other legislative proposal – that would impose unnecessary and unworkable mandatory nurse staffing ratios at hospitals.
- There is no conclusive evidence that nurse staffing ratios improve quality or patient outcomes; Illinois outperforms California – the only state in the U.S. to enact nurse staffing ratios – on several key quality metrics and rankings.
- A one-size-fits-all numerical approach to staffing takes away flexibility and decision-making autonomy from the healthcare professionals at my hospital.
The nurse leaders and direct care nurses at my hospital – who have extensive training, experience and knowledge – should be the ones making decisions for my hospital on how best to provide high quality care to our patients 24/7/365. These critical decisions made every day at my hospital – minute-by-minute and hour-by-hour – should not be mandated from Springfield.

Nurse staffing ratios will drive up healthcare costs in Illinois by at least $2 billion a year – for patients, families, employers and hospitals. My hospital simply cannot absorb the substantial, additional costs from nurse staffing ratios.

Having to hire many more registered nurses to meet the ratios will lead to staffing cuts in other areas including support staff.

Nurse staffing ratios could force my hospital to reduce or eliminate services, like behavioral health, or go on emergency bypass when we do not have enough nurses to meet the ratios, e.g., when there is a sudden influx of patients in the Emergency Department or a specific unit.

The state has a severe nursing shortage (21,000 by the year 2020) and does not have enough nurses to meet the ratio mandates. Staffing ratios will only exacerbate the nursing shortage.

Illinois already has laws on the books, including the Nurse Staffing by Patient Acuity Act, ensuring that direct care nurses and supervisors collaborate on determining appropriate staffing levels at hospitals, based on the conditions and care needs (acuity) of their patients.

Please vote No or Present on House Bill 2604 or any other legislative proposal that would mandate nurse staffing ratios.

If you have any questions about this alert, please contact Nichole Magalis.

©2020 Illinois Health and Hospital Association