



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

133 Portland Street, Boston, MA 02114 · Tel: 617-523-2999 · Fax: 617-248-0881

Email: lwvma@lwvma.org · Website: www.lwvma.org

IN SUPPORT OF H. 2059 An Act Relative to Patient Safety

Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health
October 24, 2007

By Katie Murphy

The Massachusetts League of Women Voters strongly supports this bill because it offers a remedy to the preventable errors, avoidable complications, increased lengths of stay and readmissions, and risk of deaths caused by the insufficient number of nurses on duty to take care of patients in Massachusetts' hospitals.

Concerns voiced regarding prior versions of the bill have been addressed. H. 2059 does not include mandatory minimum staffing numbers for different hospital departments but leaves it up to the Department of Public Health to supervise staffing plans submitted by each hospital. This change should be a sufficient compromise to allay the fears of hospital administrators and the Massachusetts Hospital Association. More than 100 health care and consumer advocacy groups have endorsed this bill because it meets the needs of patients.

In a study conducted in 2005 for the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) by Opinions Dynamics Corporation, Inc. (ODC), 34% of the registered nurses surveyed, fully 67% of whom were not associated with the MNA, reported patient deaths directly attributable to having too many patients to care for. Further, 77% reported an increase in medication errors, 68% reported complications or other problems for patients, and 59% reported readmissions for patients due to understaffing. All these numbers were an increase over a similar study completed in 2003.

According to a telephone survey of 150 Massachusetts physicians conducted in 2005 by ODC, most Massachusetts physicians believe that patient safety is being compromised as a result of the understaffing of registered nurses. 1 in 5 reported patient deaths directly attributable to nurses having too many patients to care for and 82% agreed the quality of patient care in hospitals is suffering due to understaffing.

Too many nurses have left active nursing in Massachusetts because they have refused to work under conditions in which their patients could not be cared for properly. The safer staffing numbers that will result from the implementation of this bill will also attract more nurses back into the work force, as has a similar bill in California. The ODC study reported that 64% of RNs not working at the bedside would consider returning to acute care settings if safer staffing levels were implemented.

Furthermore, the section of the law providing for the establishment of an expert nursing corps to mentor new nurses (Sec. 2) and providing for a student loan repayment program and a faculty position payment program for the purpose of encouraging outstanding students to work in the profession of nursing, or for existing nurses or nurse student graduates to teach nursing within the commonwealth by providing financial assistance or by providing compensation (Sec. 4), will attract more nurses to the bedside and to teaching positions.

For all of these reasons the MA Leave of Women Voters urges that you pass this bill out of committee and that you work to get it voted into law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.