March 29th, 2023

Chair Liebling

Minnesota House Health Finance and Policy

Minnesota State Office Building 100

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Liebling and members of the Health Finance and Policy Committee:

My name is Amber Hardwig. I am a registered nurse who lives and works in Duluth, and I writing to in strong support and gratitude for adding the provisions of HF 1700 Keeping Nurses at the Bedside Act into the health omnibus bill.

We need legislation to help keep our experienced nurses at the bedside. In some of our union contracts, we have tried to address unsafe assignments and short staffing; however, there are no actionable solutions for nurses OR consequences for hospital executives and management. Unsafe staffing reports are filed shift after shift, they pile up and still nothing changes. Nurses have tried to do everything we can with our contract language, but the problem continues to get worse, not better.

In my hospital there are often shifts where management have scheduled zero core nurses. Zero nurses scheduled. Instead, management relies on float nurses from other departments or travel nurses who have never been on that unit before.

The number of beds in our hospital is a static number, but the number of ‘staffed’ beds fluctuates based on shifts and staffing grids. There are often empty rooms and beds, but nobody to staff them, so we are told there are ‘no beds’. Our ED routinely holds multiple patients waiting to be admitted as an inpatient for more than 24 hours. Our community and patients deserve better.

Our ER and Labor & Delivery floors cannot turn away any patient, regardless of rooms or staff. On one recent shift our Labor & Delivery department admitted four patients who should have each had a single nurse dedicated to their care, but there was only one nurse to care for all of them. Nurses who had full assignments had to absorb more patients.

Unsafe nurse staffing levels like these can lead to important vital sign changes being missed, like dangerously high blood pressure or low blood sugar, new moms not receiving the education they need to take home their newborn, call lights not being answered in a timely manner, pain not being adequately controlled, and nurses never getting a break only further taxing our ability to support patients.

These are the conditions causing nurses to leave the bedside. Our bedside staff are morally, emotionally, and physically injured and are unfortunately walking away from the hospital setting. When that happens, we lose their skill and experience completely, and our hospitals need to invest resources, time, and money into hiring and training new employees.

We need you to intervene now to ensure that hospital bedside nurses have the support they need to continue to care for you and your loved ones. Please pass the health omnibus bill with the complete provisions from the Keeping Nurses at the Bedside Act and do not let the harmful and untrue rhetoric sway you from supporting quality patient care and nurse retention in our hospitals. We critically need your support!

Thank you for your time and support,

Amber Hardwig