

May 8, 2019

The Honorable Gayle Manning
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High St., 12th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: HB 144- Prohibit overtime work for nurses as a condition of employment

Good afternoon Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and Members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee. Thank you for allowing me to be here today to speak in support of House Bill 144.

My name is Emma Jasper and this is my dad Jim Jasper. I'm here today to share with you my story as an example of how someone's world can be turned upside down when a nurse is literally worked to death.

To begin, I'd like to read to an excerpt from my essay written for my Honors English Class, titled Life is Good.

Life is Good

The date was March 16, 2013; the sky was dreary and the air was crisply cold. I was an innocent 11-year-old girl, naïve about the future. I awoke at my grandma's house with an uncomfortable feeling that something was not going how it was supposed to. While eating breakfast, I couldn't seem to shake the feeling away. Something was terribly wrong, but what was it? I couldn't define it and began questioning the uneasiness I felt. An hour later when my dad anxiously walked up the steps into my grandma's house, my suspicions were confirmed in upsetting news that would turn my world upside down: my mom had passed away.

The previous day my mom had French braided my hair after school and before she went to work as a registered nurse at Jewish Hospital. She was wearing her normal navy blue scrubs and was rushing around the house to dress for work and to make sure I was ready to see *Peter Pan* at the Aronoff Center in Downtown Cincinnati with my grandma. I noticed she looked plagued with stress and anxiety; I assumed this was because her boss had been giving her four patients a night even though the standard for nurses is one or two. Once my grandma came to pick me up, I hugged and kissed my mom goodbye - not knowing that would be the last time I'd be held in her arms and see her bright blue eyes shine back at me.

On the way home from the play, my grandma suggested I call my mom at work to say good night. The phone rang a few times until she finally answered. She greeted me, "Hi honey how was the play?" "It was amazing mom I loved it! The music was super great and the overall story was fascinating," I stated with an excited tone. "That's great!" she exclaimed, "You will have to tell me more about it when I come home from work tomorrow morning." "I definitely will

Mom. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you that I love you and to try to have a good rest of your night at work.” My tenderhearted mom then said, “Good night honey I love you too.” Little did I know that would be the last conversation I would ever have with my mom and a mere 12 hours later my life would completely change forever.

The next morning my grandpa made my favorite breakfast: Glier’s Goetta, scrambled eggs, and toast. Around 30 minutes later, my dad, Uncle John, and six-year-old brother Jimmy pulled into the driveway. I could tell my dad looked upset by the nervous expression he had on his freckled face as he was walking through the red front door. Innocent Jimmy trudged up the stairs, just having been drug out of bed. My dad took Jimmy and me into the spare bedroom and had both of us sit on the bed. Uncle John was in the living room quietly talking to my grandparents about something. A few minutes later he came into the room we were in and closed the door. My dad squatted down until he became face to face with Jimmy and me. He started to talk, his voice shaky, “Guys Mom did not make it home from work today, she was involved in an accident.” Jimmy boasted, “Dad is she okay, is she at the hospital, can we go see her?” My dad began to shake his head no; his lip quivered and tears streamed down his face. After a few seconds this clicked into my brain and I came to the dreadful conclusion that she had passed away. Jimmy’s boyish grin faded away, being replaced with sobs of sadness. My dad grasped both of our hands and brought us into a hug. Small tears formed in the corners of my eyes and slowly trickled down my wretched face. I was in a complete state of shock and disbelief, not knowing how to react to this devastating news. My life would never be the same again; my best friend would no longer be by my side. She would never again go shopping with me, bake snickerdoodle cookies, navigate my troubles, or be there when I came home from school. Millions of questions circulated in my head: Why was this happening to me? How did it happen? What had I done to deserve this? My dad quietly forced out words in between his sobs, “Everything is going to be alright. I will do everything in my power to make sure it is. You both mean the world to me and we will get through this together.”

Over the next few hours, every family member and friend I could possibly think of had visited our house. When everyone finally left, I felt as if something was missing. I came to the unfortunate conclusion that it was my best friend.

This life-altering event happened over four years ago. From this experience I have realized how strong I have become. I went back to school after four days of being at home with my family and was forced to learn how to deal with the stress of losing a parent. I, of course, still struggle with coping with the depression and trauma that has come from this event but I have for the most part learned how to manage it. Whether I am ready for it or not, life keeps on moving forward and I cannot dwell on the past. My mom’s favorite quote was, “Life is good.” She truly believed this and definitely showed it in her life. While working as a nurse, she experienced many medical miracles along with the normal ups and downs her patients’ juggled each day. Growing up, I never understood why she loved this quote so much but now that I am older I recognize its significance. Although life is hard at times, and God continuously tests me to make me stronger, it is still a very “good life.” He had a plan for my mom’s life just like he has one for mine and this is just one moment in his master plan.

My mom began working right after graduating nursing school at Mercy Health in southern Ohio. Mercy required she care for up to 15 patient lives per shift, and my mom quickly realized that this is not what she had in mind as a bedside nurse. She knew with this many patients, she would not be able to give each patient the kind of care they deserved.

My mom next began her employment at Jewish Hospital on the bone marrow transplant unit. She enjoyed this for many reasons. She was able to interact with and care for patients in what she believed was the best way. Unfortunately, Mercy purchased Jewish hospital and the nightmare of the nurse staffing soon reoccurred.

Mercy Health had no previous experience in running a closed unit such as the bone marrow transplant unit. It soon became apparent that they didn't have any interest in listening to the many problems their staff was facing with the staffing levels. The problem at hand dealt with the unit being a closed unit. This requires nurses to be highly trained on certain equipment therefore, they were not able to pull nurses from other floors, use agency nurses, or any supplemental staff. Frustrated with the current situation, many nurses left the unit. This only left a select few who had the needed experience. This handful of nurses were responsible for the running of the entire unit, causing them to work around the clock to ensure their fellow nurses and patients received the proper care they deserved. My mom was fortunate enough to have a nurse manager who realized the enormous staffing problem. She wrote to hospital administrators regularly, telling them that if they continued on the path they were going, something terrible was going to happen either to a patient or a staff member.

There were many days I could read the stress on my mom's face. She would pick my brother and I up from school and we would have dinner together before she had to rush off again for another long night shift. She was scheduled for three days, but those three days soon turned into four and sometimes five day weeks with 13- and 14-hour shifts. There were many times I'd see my strong mom even breakdown and cry. She was incredibly dedicated to the patients, and it broke her heart knowing that she couldn't give them the attention they deserved. My mom was utterly exhausted. But what options did she have? Her fellow nurses and patients needed her.

My mom was on her way from another long, rough shift when she fell asleep at the wheel and veered off the road. Later, the state trooper brought my dad her belongings and enclosed was her lunch box, still filled with what she packed the previous afternoon but had no time to eat any of it.

My mom's manager was distraught after hearing of the accident. She emailed hospital administrators that afternoon referring to previous emails warning of the dangerous effects this staffing situation could entail. She stated that my mom's death was on their hands. Upon receiving this email, administrators felt it necessary to terminate her employment.

Nurse fatigue is real. It's not only a danger to patient care like Kelly described, but it's a danger to the nurse. Nurse fatigue is the reason I don't have my best friend by my side any longer, and nurse fatigue is what House Bill 144 will help eliminate. This bill is a symbol of hope for Ohio's nurses – another step in ensuring Ohio's nurses will no longer be worked to death.

My mom was meant to be a nurse, just like she was meant to be my mom. And perhaps she was meant to leave this life too soon, in the manner she did, in order for me to tell her story so other nurses, other daughters, other husbands and other sons won't have to go through what we have gone through.

In honor of my mother, of nurses before her, and of nurses after her – I ask that you support House Bill 144.

Thank you for your time today. And always remember, Life is Good.

Sincerely,

Emma Jasper