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Chairman
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HARAZ N. GHANBARI

State Representative | Ohio House District 75

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Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for allowing the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 285. This bill will create better conditions for both patients and nurses in Ohio's hospitals by creating a \$20 million dollar loan-to-grant program for nursing students, as well as minimum staffing ratios for nurses in all hospital units in Ohio. At its core, this legislation is about safety and supporting our nursing workforce.

House Bill 285 contains two main parts, the first being the creation of the Nursing Student Loan-to-Grant Program under the Ohio Department of Higher Education. This program would issue loans to nursing students for \$3,000 a year for up to four years, for a total of \$12,000. If the nurses stay in Ohio after five years post-graduation, this loan would then convert to a grant which would not need to be repaid. We chose a five-year service obligation because by this time, many nurses are already settled and confident in their roles, making them less likely to leave the bedside.

We know nurses in Ohio are at a breaking point. Direct care nurses are still being asked to care for far too many patients. Stressful environments and excessive workload are leading to high turnover and exacerbating the nurse staffing crises, creating a workforce problem unlike any we have ever seen. With the loan-to-grant program, we hope to alleviate some of these challenges and retain our best and brightest nurses right here in Ohio, rather than losing them to other states.

It is also a deeper and more sinister problem than conditions for bedside nurses, burnout and exhaustion can lead to adverse outcomes for patients as well. Fatality rates increase 7% for every additional patient a nurse takes on. None of us want to see any of our constituents at a greater risk for an oversight while they're at their most vulnerable and in need of critical care.

That is why House Bill 285 would also create a minimum staffing standards between 1:1 and 1:6 for all hospitals in Ohio. These ratios are based on best practices that take into account how many patients are safe for nurses to handle at any given time. Hospitals would have two years to implement these ratios. Except for hospitals in rural areas, which would have a longer on-ramp of four years.

It is important to note that we want this to be workable for hospitals. There are numerous exceptions for scenarios in which meeting these ratios may not be feasible, including states of emergency, ER patient division, inability to obtain staff after reasonable efforts by the hospital, and transfers from another hospital if a patient is in critical care. Deviations for not more than 12 hours and no more than 6 in a 30-day period are permissible, so long as the hospital doesn't deny meal breaks.

Registered nurses continue to be one of the most in-demand jobs in Ohio, according to The Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, and some may argue that these ratios will only exacerbate the workforce challenges we see. The reality is they would do the opposite because there isn't a nurse shortage in Ohio; there is a shortage of nurses willing to work in the deplorable conditions we see now.

In a survey done of nurses across Ohio, 58% of nurses who left the bedside said that they did so because of patient care load. 70% of direct care nurses are currently considering leaving the bedside because of patient care load. Most notably, 42% of nurses who have left the bedside would consider returning to the bedside if Ohio had legally enforceable minimum staffing standards.

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The time is now to take a stand on behalf of our direct care nurses, who dedicate themselves to saving lives every single day. We need strong minimum staffing standards in our hospitals to better support our workforce and serve patients to ensure Ohioans receive the highest quality healthcare possible. By passing House Bill 285, we will secure Ohio's future.

Chair Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, and Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Provider Services Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 285. I am proud to partner with Representative Rogers on this desperately needed pro-worker, pro-patient legislation, and I am happy to take any questions the committee may have.