



HB 285 – Nurse Workforce & Safe Patient Care Act

Proponent Testimony by Rick Lucas, RN, BSN, CCRN

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Good afternoon, Chair Swearingen, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee.

My name is Rick Lucas, and I am a critical care nurse. I also have the privilege of serving as the President and Executive Director of the Ohio Nurses Association, representing more than 200,000 nurses and health professionals across Ohio. Today, I stand before you as both a nurse and a leader in our profession, fighting for the tools we need to provide safe, quality care to every patient in Ohio.

House Bill 285 is about putting patients first. It is about ensuring hospitals maintain safe staffing levels to improve outcomes, retain skilled professionals, and create a healthcare system we can trust.

The current state of hospital staffing in Ohio is alarming. In 2023 alone, nurses submitted over **2,600 Assignment Despite Objection (ADO) reports**, documenting unsafe conditions in hospitals. These reports revealed:

- **Nearly 80%** of units were short-staffed for patient census.

- **76%** of staffing plans were inadequate.
- **62%** reported nurse-to-patient ratios that were simply unsafe.

These numbers reflect a systemic failure to provide nurses with the resources they need to care for their patients effectively. HB 285 addresses these failures by establishing enforceable minimum staffing standards, ensuring every hospital in Ohio meets a baseline level of safety and quality.

Hospitals that implement minimum staffing standards see tangible benefits. National studies show that better nurse-to-patient ratios significantly improve patient outcomes.

For example, a study published in *Medical Care* found that:

- The average 30-day mortality rate in hospitals with higher nurse-to-patient ratios (≥ 6 patients per nurse) was **6.1%**, compared to **4.3%** in hospitals with lower ratios.
- Minimum staffing standards reduce complications, improve patient satisfaction, and decrease readmissions.

While these results are based on national data, the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center provides a local example of how safe staffing standards can work. For years, OSU has maintained minimum staffing levels, creating a safer and more effective environment for both patients and caregivers. These practices allow OSU to respond efficiently during crises like mass trauma events, setting a benchmark for what is possible when hospitals prioritize safety. HB 285 would bring these proven benefits to hospitals across Ohio, ensuring all patients receive care that meets a minimum standard.

This bill is not just about protecting patients—it's about rebuilding the nursing profession. Ohio is not facing a shortage of qualified nurses; we are facing a shortage of nurses willing to work under unsafe conditions. According to a recent survey by the Ohio Nurses Association:

- **63%** of nurses are considering leaving bedside nursing because of unsustainable workloads.
- **89%** would stay at the bedside if minimum staffing standards were implemented, and **43%** of those who have already left would consider returning.

Think about the last time you or a loved one needed hospital care. Were you met with delays? Did you worry whether your nurse had the time and resources to provide the attention you needed? HB 285 ensures patients no longer have to wonder if there are enough nurses to deliver safe, timely care.

Minimum staffing standards are the **floor, not the ceiling**. They establish a baseline for patient safety while allowing hospitals to flex staffing up based on patient acuity and census. Without enforceable standards, hospitals face no obligation to address the persistent issues documented by Ohio's nurses. HB 285 ensures accountability, creating a sustainable healthcare system that prioritizes patient outcomes and workforce retention.

Unfortunately, opposition to HB 285 highlights a disturbing reality: patient care dollars are being funneled into high-priced lobbying efforts designed to silence the voices of nurses and health professionals calling for reform. These groups claim flexibility and innovation

are at risk, yet fail to address the daily realities of understaffing, delays, and preventable harm in Ohio hospitals. Meanwhile, hospitals like OSU Wexner Medical Center have proven that safe staffing standards improve patient outcomes and enhance emergency preparedness.

HB 285 is a reasonable, enforceable solution that establishes a minimum standard of care while maintaining the flexibility to meet patient needs. It's time for patient care dollars to fund patient safety, not efforts to block reforms that save lives. Ohio's nurses and health professionals see the impact of unsafe staffing every day. We are asking for the tools we need to provide the care our patients deserve.

Thank you for your time and attention. I welcome your questions.