



HB 285 – Nurse Workforce & Safe Patient Care Act
Proponent Testimony by Catharyne Henderson, BSN, RN
Chairwoman of Health Policy Council, Ohio Nurses Association

Good afternoon, Chair Swearingen, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee. My name is Catharyne Henderson. I am a registered nurse with 11 years of experience working in the post-surgical oncology unit at The James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute at The Ohio State University. I also serve as a member of the Board of Directors for the Ohio Nurses Association (ONA) and as Chairwoman of its Health Policy Council. I am honored to provide testimony today on the critical issue of minimum staffing standards.

My dual roles as a bedside nurse and a union leader have given me a unique perspective on the impact of staffing levels on patient outcomes and the sustainability of the nursing workforce. In my tenure working on the unit, I have seen firsthand how staffing ratios directly affect patient care and nurse wellbeing. I have seen many of my colleagues leave the bedside and some have unfortunately left the profession all together due to the demands. Proper staffing is more than a logistical goal—it's a matter of life and death for our patients and the professional sustainability of the nurses who care for them.

Through my work with ONA, I have had the privilege of meeting nurses across the country—those working in states with minimum staffing standards and those without. The differences are stark. Hospitals with safe staffing laws see better patient outcomes, including significantly reduced readmission and mortality rates. Research shows that adequate staffing not only reduces complications and improves safety but also enables nurses to spend the necessary time with each patient, providing the level of care they deserve.

By contrast, Ohio's nurses face a chronic staffing crisis, as highlighted in ONA's recent statewide survey. The results are deeply concerning: 63% of nurses are considering leaving bedside care due to unsafe staffing, and 65% report experiencing workplace violence in the last year—another issue exacerbated by understaffing. We are rapidly approaching a breaking point where the growing demands placed on nurses are unsustainable. Without minimum staffing standards, this will lead to a mass exodus from the profession, leaving Ohio's healthcare system dangerously unprepared to meet the needs of our communities.

Ohio nurses want to provide the best possible care, but they are being asked to do so under conditions that make it impossible. Nurses are forced to take on unsafe patient loads, leading to burnout, errors, and preventable harm. Patients—and their families—pay the price. Meanwhile, hospitals with better staffing models consistently show lower patient mortality rates, shorter stays, and improved safety. This is the future we should be building toward, one in which needs to start now.

The Ohio Nurses Association's *Survey of all Ohio Nurses: 2024 Staffing Findings*, which I have provided as an addendum to my testimony, reveals the extent of the crisis and makes it clear that we are at a crossroads. It is time for Ohio to invest in solutions that protect both patients and the nurses who serve them. Minimum staffing standards are essential to improving patient outcomes, reducing nurse turnover, and ensuring that healthcare in Ohio remains sustainable for years to come.

And let me be very clear-there is not a "Californication" for healthcare here in Ohio. What is happening to healthcare here in Ohio is a problem across the country, but my colleagues and I are working proactively attempting to stop it. I urge this committee to take bold action by enacting minimum staffing standards. Together, we can build a healthcare system that prioritizes the health and safety of both patients and nurses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.