

## **Professional Hearing Response to H.B. 285**

**By David Kissinger, RN**

**Date: November 19, 2024**

**Location: Health Provider Services Committee, Room 017**

**Subject: Testimony in Support of Ohio House Bill 285 - Nurse Staffing Standards and Nursing Student Loan-to-Grant Program**

Chairperson Swearingen, Vice-Chairperson Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill 285. My name is David Kissinger, and I am a Registered Nurse at Mercy Health. I have worked in behavioral health care for several years and have seen firsthand the impact of staffing challenges on both patient outcomes and the well-being of healthcare professionals.

This legislation is a vital step forward in addressing the systemic issues facing Ohio's healthcare system, and I fully support its passage.

### **Why H.B. 285 Matters**

#### **1. Patient Safety and Quality of Care**

The staffing ratios outlined in this bill are essential for ensuring safe, effective care across all hospital units. In behavioral health, where patients often experience crises requiring immediate intervention, adequate staffing is critical. Research has shown that lower nurse-to-patient ratios correlate with:

- **Reduced Patient Mortality:** A study from *Health Services Research* demonstrated that nurse staffing legislation, like California's, led to significantly lower patient mortality rates.
- **Improved Behavioral Health Outcomes:** Adequate staffing in psychiatric units reduces incidents of violence, self-harm, and the use of restraints, creating a safer environment for both patients and staff.

#### **2. Nurse Retention and Job Satisfaction**

Nurses consistently rank staffing shortages as a leading cause of burnout and turnover. This bill's mandated ratios will provide relief to nurses by:

- Creating manageable workloads.
- Allowing more time for therapeutic engagement with patients.
- Improving workplace morale and long-term retention.

### **3. The Nursing Student Loan-to-Grant Program**

The \$20 million allocated to this program is a practical, forward-thinking investment in Ohio's healthcare workforce. By offering forgivable loans to nursing students, this program incentivizes service in high-need areas like behavioral health and rural hospitals. Similar programs in Minnesota and North Dakota have significantly bolstered nursing staff in underserved regions.

#### **Lessons from Other States**

States like California, Massachusetts, and New York have demonstrated the effectiveness of staffing ratio legislation. Their experiences show:

- **Fewer Adverse Events:** Massachusetts reported reduced mortality rates and improved outcomes in ICUs following implementation of its staffing standards.
- **Increased Nurse Satisfaction:** New York's staffing committees improved communication between nurses and administrators, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention.

These successes provide a clear roadmap for Ohio to follow.

#### **Fiscal Impact and Long-Term Benefits**

While initial implementation costs may strain hospitals, particularly in rural areas, the long-term benefits are substantial:

- Reduced nurse turnover and recruitment costs.
- Fewer penalties from adverse events and readmissions.
- Shorter hospital stays due to improved care quality.

The fiscal note recognizes these savings and highlights the potential for cost recovery through Medicaid adjustments and lower operational disruptions(fiscal-notes).

#### **Behavioral Health-Specific Recommendations**

In behavioral health units, staffing challenges are compounded by high patient acuity and unpredictable care needs. To ensure the success of H.B. 285, I recommend:

1. **Dedicated Behavioral Health Training:** Providing additional resources for nurses in psychiatric care to enhance their skills in crisis management and trauma-informed care.
2. **Flexibility in Staffing Models:** Allowing behavioral health units to adapt staffing ratios based on real-time patient acuity while maintaining safety standards.

## **Conclusion**

House Bill 285 is a necessary, evidence-based solution to Ohio's nurse staffing crisis. By addressing staffing standards, transparency, and workforce development, this legislation will improve patient safety, reduce nurse burnout, and ensure the long-term viability of our healthcare system.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this bill and consider supplemental measures to assist hospitals in achieving compliance. Thank you for your attention, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,  
David Kissinger, RN  
Mercy Health