

HB 285 – Nurse Workforce & Safe Patient Care Act

Proponent Testimony by Whitney Hamlin

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

My name is Whitney Hamlin, and I am a registered nurse with experience working on a busy medical-surgical unit. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 285, which would require hospitals to establish registered nurse staffing plans. As someone who has witnessed firsthand the impact of inadequate staffing on both patient outcomes and the well-being of healthcare professionals, I urge you to support this critical legislation.

Throughout my career, I have faced the challenge of short staffing, which often results in unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios. On multiple occasions, I have been assigned to care for six or more patients at a time, sometimes as the sole nurse for those patients. This level of responsibility is not only overwhelming but also jeopardizes patient safety. When nurses are overburdened, it becomes incredibly difficult to provide the high-quality care that every patient deserves.

Numerous studies confirm that exceeding safe nurse-to-patient ratios increases the risk of medication errors, patient falls, delayed interventions, and other adverse events. Evidence supports that a ratio of one nurse to four patients is ideal for ensuring positive patient outcomes and protecting nurse well-being. With proper staffing, nurses have the ability to perform thorough assessments, coordinate care effectively, and provide timely interventions—leading to improved patient satisfaction and better health outcomes.

HB 285 represents an essential step in holding hospitals accountable for implementing staffing plans that prioritize patient safety and the well-being of nurses. By mandating the development of these plans, we can create safer working environments for healthcare professionals and safer care environments for the patients we serve.

I have been in healthcare since I was 19 years old and am now 31. My journey started as a state-tested nursing assistant (STNA), then as a licensed practical nurse (LPN), and finally as a registered nurse. I have seen the effects of short staffing from all angles—whether overwhelmed as an STNA or as a nurse responsible for too many patients. It is not safe. It is not fair to patients or to those of us who are truly committed to this profession and want to provide high-quality care.

The reality is that many nurses, including myself, are being driven away from bedside care. I am currently transitioning to outpatient care because I can no longer endure the overwhelming demands of bedside nursing. Nurses are leaving in record numbers due to poor staffing and unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios. In my two years as a bedside medical-surgical nurse, I have already made the difficult decision to leave. This turnover is unsustainable and detrimental to the profession and to patient care.

Beyond staffing ratios, the excessive workloads have turned nursing into a task-oriented job, leaving little time to build meaningful connections with patients. This is disheartening and erodes the very reason many of us entered this field—to provide compassionate, high-quality care.

I urge you to support HB 285 because safe staffing is not a matter of convenience; it is a matter of life and death. Investing in safe staffing plans is an investment in the health and safety of both patients and the healthcare workforce. This legislation has the potential to bring lasting, positive change to nursing and improve the quality of care for Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and for considering this vital issue. I look forward to your support for HB 285.

Sincerely,
Whitney Hamlin, RN, ADN