



## Interested Party Testimony to HB 33

*Capping pay for Ohio's nurses will exacerbate the patient care crisis.*

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and Honorable Members of the Senate Medicaid Committee,

My name is Anthony Caldwell and I have the pleasure of serving as the Director of Government Relations for the Ohio Nurses Association, the voice of Ohio's 180,000 Registered Nurses since 1904. The Ohio Nurses Association is a strong community of union and non-union registered nurses who are dedicated to protecting and advancing the profession and impacting healthcare in Ohio.

ONA supports the regulation of healthcare staffing agencies as proposed in the House-passed budget bill, and general transparency within the healthcare system. However, we are opposed to language in Sec. 3724.09 of House Bill 33 which could lead to capping nurse pay and limiting nurses' ability to negotiate contract terms and change employment.

This provision prohibits agencies from billing or receiving payments from healthcare providers for any category of healthcare personnel at a rate that is higher than 150% of the statewide direct care median hourly wage for that category of personnel. ONA believes that this effectively caps what an agency can bill for a nurse, thus capping what they can and will ultimately pay them. This will directly lead to the lowering and restricting of nurse wages.

ONA vehemently opposes the government-imposed pay limitations on a workforce that has been answering the call to serve above and beyond usual workplace conditions for almost three years. Nurses should not be punished for economic and pandemic conditions, and a permanent, statutory response to current market conditions based simply on supply and demand that may easily fluctuate would be highly inadvisable.

The profession of nursing is facing "The Great Resignation," where professionals are leaving their careers due to feeling underappreciated and overworked. In fact, according to a January 2022 article published by Kathleen Gaines, over 1,500 nurses reported feeling burnt out, underpaid, and unsupported at work, with mental health issues and unsafe working conditions being some of the biggest problems. Millions of nurses nationally are reporting they plan to leave the profession entirely or seek early retirement.

Furthermore, staffing issues are a longstanding problem within healthcare that has largely been ignored by top-level decision-makers within the government and healthcare systems. Instead of taking immediate and robust action, that looks at both short-term and long-term solutions, we are penalizing nurses for choosing to work for staffing agencies and the flexibility they provide.



In many cases, staffing agencies have offered higher wages, better working conditions, and more flexibility for Ohio's nurses over traditional nursing home settings. These staffing companies have thus been filling a gap in the nursing workforce system by providing nurses a backup option when existing facilities are providing unreasonable working conditions. If this language is enacted, nurses will no longer see staffing employment as a viable option either, likely forcing more nurses to leave the profession entirely. If healthcare employers want to remain competitive, they will need to prioritize the needs of nurses to meet the demand created by market forces.

In conclusion, ONA supports the regulation of healthcare staffing agencies and transparency within the healthcare system. However, we are opposed to language in House Bill 33 that could lead to capping nurse pay and limiting nurses' ability to negotiate contract terms and change employment.

Thank you for allowing me to share our concerns with you.