



Protect Patient Safety & Access: Enhance Washington's Model Nurse Staffing Committee Law

Background

Washington State is not immune to the nationwide nursing workforce crisis. There are not enough licensed nurses in Washington to fill the thousands of RN vacancies in our hospitals, and there is no single, simple solution. In addition to growing the nursing workforce in our state by attracting already-trained nurses and training new nurses, we need to retain the nurses currently working at patient bedsides by improving the accountability of hospital nurse staffing committees.

WSHA Position

Washington's nurse-led staffing committee law is a national model lauded by nursing organizations across the country, but we agree they need to be strengthened. WSHA supports enhancing our nurse staffing committee law by:

- Strengthening the enforcement mechanism for non-compliance
- Requiring Nurse Staffing Committees to file a charter
- Requiring Nurse Staffing Committees to use a uniform form/format for nurse staffing plans
- Increasing CEO accountability for changes to nurse staffing plans
- Creating a statewide technical assistance team to support nurse staffing committees

Key Messages

Safe hospital staffing balances the needs of the patient and family with the knowledge, skills and abilities of the direct patient care staff. Since patient conditions constantly fluctuate, flexible nurse staffing that goes beyond fixed nurse-to-patient ratios is critical. Collaborative, trusted and well-run nurse-led staffing committees are the best way to ensure safe staffing and workforce satisfaction across patient care units.

- Washington's nursing unions have suggested updates to the nurse staffing committee law, such as requiring committees to file charters and use a uniform form or format for nurse staffing plans. They have also expressed a need to strengthen the enforcement mechanism for non-compliance and increase CEO accountability for changes to nurse staffing plans adopted by committees. WSHA agrees with these suggested updates.
- Many nurse staffing committees are working well. However, others are experiencing challenges. We need a statewide technical assistance team, involving both hospital and nursing representatives, who can help nurse staffing committees build trust, resolve disputes and optimize performance.

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