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Lynne M. Dixon  
Legislator, District 9  
Chairperson  
Health and Human Services Committee  
The Erie County Legislature  
92 Franklin Street - 4th Floor  
Buffalo, New York 14202

*Submitted electronically: lynne.dixon@erie.gov*

Dear Ms. Dixon:

On behalf of the Healthcare Association of New York State (HANYS), I write to express strong opposition to state legislation that would mandate specific, statewide staffing ratios in hospitals and nursing homes. HANYS urges the Erie County Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee to refrain from acting on a resolution backing mandatory statewide staffing ratios.

HANYS is the only statewide hospital and continuing care association in New York State, representing 500 non-profit and public hospitals, health systems, nursing homes, home care agencies, and other healthcare organizations.

Effective and appropriate staffing is critical to the provision of quality care at all healthcare organizations. Staffing decisions should remain with local hospitals, nursing homes, and healthcare professionals.

The legislation on staffing ratios imposes a one-size-fits-all statewide mandate when one size does not fit all. Every patient is different. Every nurse and other available staff have unique expertise and experience. No hospitals or nursing homes are the same. Therefore, flexibility is essential to respond to diverse patient and resident needs that evolve and can change quickly.

Hospitals and nursing homes develop staffing plans tailored to individual patient care needs, taking into account the experience, education, and preparation of the staff; the use of technology; and the facility's physical layout. Delivering effective and reliable patient-centered care requires a full partnership with nurses working within a multi-disciplinary team, alongside physicians, medical assistants, care coordinators, aids, other allied professionals, as well as with active patient and family engagement.

To mandate arbitrary static ratios diminishes the judgment of the professional nurse and the role of staff of various disciplines who all contribute time to the care of each patient or resident.

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While recognizing the importance of staffing, research does not support mandated statewide ratios. Many factors can contribute to improved outcomes, including the level of nurse education, teamwork, and implementation of evidence-based practices to improve care.

Hospitals, health systems, and nursing homes continue to aggressively implement and invest in patient care improvement strategies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recognized the important work of the New York State Partnership for Patients (NYSPFP) in achieving significant quality improvements in hospitals. NYSPFP's activities build upon the many innovative and successful quality improvement initiatives taking place in hospitals and health systems and are tailored to meet the needs and resources of each hospital and community.

California remains the only state with hospital-wide minimum nurse-to-patient ratios. Reports continue to indicate that the requirement has caused disruptions and elimination of services, increased diversion of patients arriving at the emergency department (ED), increased ED wait time, and postponement of surgeries/limiting admissions. Staffing ratios in California have resulted in a decline in the number of other care staff who support nurses in their duties or that enhance care by offering services in other specialized categories.

The fiscal implications of this bill are dire—about \$3 billion annually to hospitals and nursing homes and likely the largest-ever unfunded healthcare mandate in New York.

Providing quality patient care is the top priority of HANYS' members. New York is a center of quality improvement efforts that help healthcare providers identify priorities and implement, manage, and sustain quality improvement initiatives.

We believe that there are steps that can be taken to support nurses and other caregivers including efforts to increase the proportion of nurses educated at the baccalaureate level, providing state funding for scholarships and loan forgiveness programs, addressing the challenges of the schools of nursing, ensuring that registered nurses can work to the full extent of their education and preparation, increasing the use of evidence-based practice protocols to improve patient outcomes, embracing team approaches to care, attracting people into healthcare careers, and reducing unnecessary documentation.

In closing, HANYS urges the Erie County Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee to refrain from action on a resolution on staffing ratios.

Sincerely,



Dennis P. Whalen  
President

DPW: rf

cc: Karen M. McCarthy