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NEWS RELEASE



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Nurse Staffing Legislation

REGISTERED NURSE SAFE STAFFING BILL
INTRODUCED IN SENATE

Bill highlights importance of nurse staffing levels

SILVER SPRING, MD –The American Nurses Association (ANA) today applauds the introduction of federal legislation in the U.S. Senate that empowers registered nurses (RNs) to drive staffing decisions in hospitals, protect patients and improve the quality of care.

The Registered Nurse Safe Staffing Act of 2014 (S. 2353), crafted with input from ANA, is sponsored by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR). ANA supports a companion staffing bill introduced in the House in May 2013, [the Registered Nurse Safe Staffing Act of 2013 \(H.R. 1821\)](#).

“It is encouraging that members of both chambers of Congress understand the connection between nurse staffing and patient safety. There is no room for debate: when there are appropriate nurse staffing levels, lives are saved and patient outcomes improve,” said ANA President Karen A. Daley, PhD, RN, FAAN. “With federal legislation we can vastly advance the quality of patient care and improve working conditions for nurses.”

[Research has shown that higher staffing levels by experienced RNs are linked to lower rates of patient falls, infections, medication errors, and even death.](#) And when unanticipated events happen in a hospital resulting in patient death, injury, or permanent loss of function, inadequate nurse staffing often is cited as a contributing factor.

“As the husband of a nurse, I know firsthand the many challenges nurses face and how critical their care is to patients,” said Sen. Merkley. “Safe staffing that enhances patient care, reduces medical errors and bolsters nurse retention all at the same time would be a tremendous improvement to health care delivery.”

MORE . . .

RN SAFE STAFFING BILL INTRODUCED/ PAGE 2. . .

The bill would require hospitals to establish committees that would create unit-by-unit nurse staffing plans based on multiple factors, such as the number of patients on the unit, severity of the patients' conditions, experience and skill level of the RNs, availability of support staff, and technological resources.

“As a nurse, and someone who's been involved in both patient care and policy discussions about staffing for decades, I'm so pleased to see Sen. Merkley standing up for patients in hospitals across the country,” said Susan King, MS, RN, CEN, FAAN, executive director of the Oregon Nurses Association, a constituent member of ANA. “We know that nurse staffing levels impact patient outcomes and nurse retention, and—as the people providing care to patients—nurses bring an intimate understanding of patient needs to the discussion about how to most appropriately staff a facility. This is critical legislation for every patient in a hospital and for the nurses who care for them.”

The safe staffing bill also would require hospitals that participate in Medicare to publicly report nurse staffing plans for each unit. It would place limits on the practice of “floating” nurses by ensuring that RNs are not forced to work on units if they lack the education and experience in that specialty. It also would hold hospitals accountable for safe nurse staffing by requiring the development of procedures for receiving and investigating complaints; allowing imposition of civil monetary penalties for knowing violations; and providing whistle-blower protections for those who file a complaint about staffing.

Additionally, ANA has advocated for optimal nurse staffing through the development and updating of [ANA's Principles for Nurse Staffing](#), and development of a [national nursing quality database](#) program that correlates staffing to patient outcomes.

To date, [seven states have passed nurse safe staffing legislation that closely resembles ANA's recommended approach](#) to ensure safe staffing, utilizing a hospital-wide staffing committee in which direct care nurses have a voice in creating the appropriate staffing levels. Those states are Connecticut, Illinois, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

For more information on ANA's safe staffing legislative efforts, please visit <http://www.RNaction.org/>.

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ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 3.1 million registered nurses through its constituent and state nurses associations and its organizational affiliates. ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public. Please visit www.nursingworld.org for more information.