

# The Solution to Pennsylvania's Bedside Nurse Shortage:



## Patient Safety Act

*Pennsylvania is facing a crisis in healthcare: for decades, facilities have struggled with a shortage of nurses staying at the bedside, despite increasing graduation rates. The question is not how to attract more professionals to healthcare, but how to keep dedicated staff at the bedside. We must pass the Patient Safety Act (HB 106 / SB 240) to address the underlying conditions that drive burnout and turnover.*

### 1. Pennsylvania has a robust pipeline for new nurses:

- Over 81,000 licensed Registered Nurses in Pennsylvania (36% of all Pennsylvania RNs) are not currently employed in healthcare.<sup>1</sup>
- The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reports that nursing programs in the US have seen more than 15 years of continuous enrollment growth, and, despite challenges presented by COVID, enrollment in nursing programs “surged” during the pandemic, increasing by 5.6% in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Since 2003, enrollment in Pennsylvania Nursing School Registered Nurse Programs has increased by 49%.<sup>3</sup>
- The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis projects a surplus of Registered Nurses in Pennsylvania of over 5% (over 8,000 nurses) by 2030.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. But nurses are leaving the bedside because of unsafe staffing:

- The General Assembly's Joint State Government Commission on Pennsylvania's Health Care Workforce Needs concluded in 2019 that as many as 30% to 50% of newly licensed Registered Nurses leave the bedside within their first 3 years.<sup>5</sup>
- In a 2017 survey, 94% of Pennsylvania nurses reported that their facility does not have enough nursing staff, and 87% reported that staffing levels affecting patient care are getting worse. Over 80% reported that a high rate of nurse turnover is a problem at their facility, and that the rate of turnover among nurses has increased.<sup>6</sup>
- According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health's “Pulse of Pennsylvania's Registered Nurse Workforce,” unsafe staffing is the single greatest source of job dissatisfaction among nurses.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The solution is to pass the Patient Safety Act to improve conditions & bring more nurses to—and keep them at—the bedside:

- Analysis of Pennsylvania hospitals shows a strong correlation between staffing levels and job satisfaction. Across the board, heavier patient loads result in higher nurse burnout.<sup>8</sup>
- California solved their nursing shortage by implementing staffing ratios in the law: Hospitals were able to hire enough RNs to meet the ratios without a decrease in the skill mix of nursing staff in hospitals;<sup>9</sup> and many more nurses moved to California to practice under safe conditions.<sup>10</sup> The state was facing a nursing shortage, but after improving staffing standards in the law, the shortage gradually but consistently disappeared by 2013 and the state has enjoyed a nurse surplus since then.<sup>10</sup>

# Research

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