



NEWS RELEASE

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Hawaii Nurses Unions, Legislators, and Labor and Community Leaders Introducing Legislation to Ensure Safe Patient Care Standards

In response to ongoing pleas from nurses across the state for safer patient care, a coalition of Hawai'i's nursing unions, representing more than 5,000 nurses, are joining forces to introduce critical legislation aimed at ensuring safer staffing in hospitals.

Hawai'i's three major nurses unions—the Hawai'i Nurses' Association, Hawaii Nurses and Healthcare Professionals, and the United Nurses and Health Care Employees of Hawaii—locked arms with legislators, and labor and community leaders at a rally today at the Hawai'i State Capitol to make their message loud and clear: there is an urgent need for reforms to improve patient care and strengthen the state's healthcare system.

Patients also shared their personal stories at today's rally, underscoring the critical need for these reforms and ensuring nurses have manageable workload so that patients can receive the dedicated care they need and deserve.

Unlike many other states with mandated patient-to-nurse ratios, Hawai'i currently lacks these vital protections. As healthcare workers continue to face systemic challenges that compromise patient outcomes, the unions are urging lawmakers to prioritize safe staffing laws in the upcoming legislative session. This broad-based, communitywide effort underscores the urgent need to address Hawai'i's healthcare crisis and ensure every resident receives the highest standard of care.

The legislation introduced by Representative Sean Quinlan, known as the Hawaii Safe Staffing Proposal, seeks to enhance patient safety and quality of care by establishing enforceable patient-to-nurse ratios, ensuring transparency, and improving accountability in hospital staffing practices.

Studies have shown that every patient added to a nurses' workload increases patient mortality rates by 7%*. Key provisions in the proposed legislation include minimum staffing ratios tailored to hospital units, mandatory nurse-led staffing committees, and oversight by the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to enforce compliance and address violations.

The proposed legislation focuses on creating enforceable patient-to-nurse staffing ratios that will save lives, lead to improved nurse retention and reduce nurse burnout, with flexibility for emergencies to maintain care standards. Additionally, the legislation will establish safety committees to further protect patients and healthcare workers. Scheduled for implementation in September 2025, this proposal elevates Hawai'i to be on par with other states prioritizing a patient-centered healthcare system.

In his remarks, Rep. Quinlan said, "My support for this legislation goes beyond my duties as a Representative. As a father and a community member, I believe that every patient in Hawai'i deserves the same standard of care. That is why I am sponsoring this legislation to create a safer and more supportive environment in our healthcare system."

Here's what Hawaii's union leaders had to say:

Rosalee Agas-Yuu, RN, President, Hawaii Nurses Association (HNA):

"This legislation is a game-changer for patient care in Hawaii. By addressing the root causes of burnout and staffing shortages, we are ensuring that every patient receives the care and attention they deserve. After years of fighting for change, we are finally seeing progress that puts patients at the center of healthcare reform. In recent months, all of us as separate unions have taken on fights for safe staffing, and today, for the first time, we are uniting to make history in Hawaii. This is what it's about—safe staffing for all, not just one union or one hospital. We are a united front, fighting for every resident and every patient in the state of Hawaii to have safer care."

Terilyn Carvalho Luke, RN, President, Hawaii Nurses and Healthcare Professionals (HNHP):

"Staffing challenges directly impact the quality of care patients receive. Safe patient-to-nurse ratios save lives and empower nurses to advocate for what's best for their patients. Nurses are at the forefront of patient care, spending more time with patients than anyone else on the healthcare team. By uniting our voices across all three nurses unions, we are taking a stand at the Capitol to ensure every patient in Hawaii receives the dedicated, life-saving care they deserve."

Charmaine Morales, RN, President, United Nurses and Health care Employees of Hawaii (UNHCE-UNAC/UHCP):

"Patients are at the heart of everything we do. With enforceable staffing ratios and safety committees, we can ensure that every patient receives the time, attention, and care they deserve. This legislation addresses a systemic issue with a systemic solution, ensuring that Hawaii residents receive the same high standard of care as anywhere else. Our nurses are here for every patient, every time."

Christian Fern, Executive Director, University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) AFT Local 6625:

"When our keiki or kūpuna enter a hospital, we shouldn't have to worry whether a nurse will be available to give them the attention they need for their recovery or to identify symptoms that require immediate intervention. That's what we pay for. This law will set a standard for all hospitals across our state and will ensure our 'ohana will receive quality care and ensure all of Hawai'i's valued nurses are treated fairly and equitably."

* Aiken, L. H.; Clarke, S. P.; Sloane, D. M.; Sochalski, J.; & Silber, J. H. (2002) *Hospital nurse staffing and patient mortality, nurse burnout, and job dissatisfaction*. JAMA, 288(16), (1987-1993) Retrieved August 14, 2018 from doi:10.1001/jama.288.16.1987

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