

Submitter: Ana Berry

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure: SB1549

As a nurse working hard throughout the pandemic, I would like to strongly voice my disappointment that a bill like this has even been proposed. To focus on a measure that would cap nursing salaries instead of focusing on creating safe working conditions, mandatory staffing ratios and ways to financially incentivize core staff to STAY in their jobs through increased safety and benefits, hazard pay, sick time, and other protections ... you have missed the point entirely. To be even thinking about punishing nurses to curb healthcare costs rather than holding hospital executives and management to account for their unethical and unsafe working conditions and their own high pay is, to put it mildly, peak capitalism and deeply unethical.

Passing a measure that allows OHA to dictate nurse pay through agencies will have the opposite effect you are hoping for. Travel nurses will begin to quit, en masse, because you're already over-taxed, burnt out, and quickly dwindling nursing staff will realize that rather than focus on patient safety and nurse safety by putting the nexus of responsibility for this crisis SQUARELY on hospital management, you will instead be placing that burden on nursing staff.

I left my staff job last July, not to make more money, but because I was exhausted. Travel nursing is not better for us, but simply allows us to make the best of a terrible situation with increased flexibility and better pay. This pay helps make up for our complete lack of healthcare benefits, sick time, and the inconvenience we face in having to find new living accommodations that are flexible on tenants timing and fully furnished on short notice. If we are left unprotected by safe staffing laws, and allowed to be bullied by hospitals who will not cover injuries/light duty or healthcare for their travel nurses, you are leaving us all in the lurch.

Once again, a better choice here is to take this opportunity to focus ON MANDATORY SAFE STAFFING RATIOS not a terrible bandaid solution like capping nurses pay. I have had major back injuries TWICE in the last year due to understaffing. My patients don't get adequate care and I have no assurance that my health and safety will be protected going forward. If you protect nurses, we will protect you. I would happily stay in my staff job, making my normal rate, if I had adequate help to safely manage the care of my patients. Capping nursing salaries, in the middle of a pandemic, sends a very clear message to all of us that you do not have our back, and I therefore have no motivation to have yours. I'll quit, and I'm sure many others will too. Thanks for listening :)

Do the right thing.