

LD 1639 An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve Patient Care

**Testimony in Opposition
May 4, 2023**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Brad Gilbert, and I am here today on behalf of Northern Light C.A. Dean Hospital and Northern Light Health speaking in strong opposition to this bill.

I am a registered nurse with 14 years of critical care and emergency department experience. I have been a Maine resident for most of my life. I am the Director of Clinical Services at Northern Light C.A Dean Hospital. My priority has always been to ensure high levels of patient safety.

C.A. Dean is Maine's smallest critical access hospital, we serve several thousand miles of rural and ragged terrain surrounding Moosehead Lake and beyond. In 2022, we were awarded the Guardian of Excellence and Pinnacle of Excellence Awards from PressGaney. Receiving these awards, from an external reviewer is an outlier when compared to hospitals throughout the country.

C.A. Dean follows a blended nursing model. Our nursing team is composed of RNs, LPNs, and CNAs whose primary goal is patient safety. Our unique size allows our team to remain highly flexible to provide emergency care when needed. In addition, C.A. Dean uses remote video monitoring for our dementia patients to prevent falls within the hospital.

During COVID, our response went without a hitch as we navigated supply chains, extended illnesses, and capacity strains. Our leadership & frontline teams worked together to ensure best practices while limiting the spread of multiple variants. For decades, we have not had one occurrence of significant patient injury or death as a result of RN understaffing.

We have challenges ahead of us. RN positions have remained open for years. We rely heavily on high cost, temporary staffing in multiple areas within our hospital. Though our care team is highly engaged, we are limited because demand for nurses exceeds the number of nurses available in the workforce. NLH does have connectivity to Eastern Maine Community College's Rural Nursing Program which is helpful to train rural nurses.

My nursing colleagues and I are looking forward to the new Northern Light CA Dean Hospital currently under construction. The hospital was designed to meet the needs of the Moosehead region. Unfortunately, with this bill, if passed, there will be demonstrative negative effects for Northern Light C.A. Dean. We will be required to recruit 20 additional full-time RNs. This is

very concerning considering the new acute care area will only be about 11,000 square feet. The increase is because of the requirement for having 2 RNs per unit 24/7. In our current model, we have a minimum of 1 RN for each care team.

In the Spring of 2024, our hospital transitions from 4 Nursing Stations to 2. If this bill is to pass, our required RN staffing will increase only to meet this one section of the bill. Considering our acuity levels, low patient census, and physical space constraints, this bill is not warranted. There will be a significant financial burden with an unlikely quality enhancement for our community hospital that struggles with daily changes within the hardships of an ever-changing health care landscape. This bill fails to acknowledge the excellent care and support that our CNAs and technicians provide on a daily basis.

If this bill is passed, emergency department diversion situations are likely to occur regularly. These occurrences would significantly limit emergency department access for our community and the greater Moosehead Lake region. Many of you are aware that there is no 24-hour emergency room in Jackman, Maine. When an emergency occurs, and individuals need ground or air transport small rural hospitals in this very large challenging geography simply won't be allowed by law to care for the emergency patients on any given day.

Maine legislators have voted down similar legislation several times in the past as have all states throughout the country excluding California which has continued issues with quality care delivery. Please let our local practitioners, healthcare leaders, nurses, and allied health care providers continue to provide the safe and necessary care that our communities continue to receive.

If passed, Maine is likely to have difficult discussions related to hospital bed closures, lack of health care access, and payment challenges as neither Medicare nor MaineCare will increase reimbursement to cover the hundreds of millions of dollars that this legislation will cost hospitals statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in strong opposition to this bill.

Respectfully,



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