

MI NURSES Association

Affiliate of National Nurses United and AFL-CIO

What makes an effective RN story about the need for a safe staffing law

Prepare an example from your experience that shows the need for Michigan to enact a safe limit on the number of patients nurses are assigned. Strong stories follow these guidelines:

Focus on RN staffing and the unique role of RNs. The most important factor affecting the care you get in the hospital is the number of patients RNs are assigned at one time. While other staff are important members of the team, there is no substitute for the time and attention of a skilled Registered Nurse.

Stay brief. It can be hard, but you'll likely have limited time. Keep it to about three minutes.

Have a beginning, middle and end. Time limits can make this challenging, but you don't want to tell a story that distracts the listener with unanswered questions.

Show the need for legislation. The problem is hospitals' widespread practice of routinely understaffing on purpose, and problems that could have been prevented by a law. Avoid scenarios that the legislation won't affect: ex: two nurses calling in, a pile-up on the freeway.

Make it about the patient - not nurses. What moves people isn't hearing about your lack of a lunch break or child care problems because of being mandated: they care about their loved ones getting hurt in the hospital. Connect with people's emotional investment in their families; for example, you may want to say, "what if it was your grandmother?"

Explain things in a way non-nurses can understand. Avoid jargon; paint a picture. For example, "My patient was an older woman who was very frail, there was a high risk of her falling if she got out of bed on her own."

Provide context: For example: "I was assigned 8 patients on a recent shift. A safe assignment would have been 4 patients."

Protect patients' privacy and never incriminate yourself or a colleague.

Stick to our overall message. For example, this isn't about a shortage of nurses. Hospitals are responsible for providing safe levels of staffing and need to stop making excuses. Nurses try to solve these problems internally but that's not enough. Hospitals won't do it on their own; therefore, Michigan needs a law.

REMEMBER: Always focus on patient safety and bring your conversations back to how a law can protect patients from harm and save lives.