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FINANCE

Effort intensifies on setting nursing levels  
Jennifer Heldt Powell

Health care activists, through a new coalition, plan to relaunch today their fight for state-mandated nursing staff levels. About 60 state health care groups have formed the Coalition to Protect Massachusetts Patients, including Health Care for All, the Massachusetts Senior Action Council and the Massachusetts Nurses Association.

"It is proven that when a patient is cared for by a sufficient number of registered nurses, their chances of health improve and their risk of death dramatically decreases," said Sandy Ellis, a director for the association.

The Legislature is weighing the mandate proposal.

In addition to pushing for mandated nursing staff levels, the group is launching an Internet site ([www.protectmasspatients.org](http://www.protectmasspatients.org)) to provide information about the issue and a hotline for patients to report problems, at 617-731-2813.

The mandates are opposed by industry leaders who say the mandates would undermine the flexibility they need to manage the services their institutions provide. Also, they argue that such mandates would lead to inefficiencies.

"Anything that impedes good clinical judgment impedes good clinical care," said David P. Smith, the Massachusetts Hospital Association's clinical policy chief.

The number of nurses needed to provide care can change hourly as patients' conditions change, he said. Mandates, he added, "restrict the ability of clinicians and nurse managers to assign nurses as deemed necessary."