

## **West Virginia governor signs law to bar private hospitals from forcing nurses to work overtime**

GAVIN McCORMICK, Associated Press Writer Wednesday, February 25, 2004

10:02 PST CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) —

Gov. Bob Wise signed into law Wednesday a bill barring private hospitals from forcing nurses to work overtime except in emergencies or to complete a patient procedure.

Surrounded by dozens of white-uniformed nurses, Wise echoed health care and union officials by saying the law would improve patient safety and prevent medical mistakes by nurses exhausted by long hours.

Beginning May 17, nurses who work more than 12 hours must be allowed at least eight hours off.

“We cannot ask nurses to work hours on end, jeopardizing patient and employee lives,” Wise said.

The law will cover an estimated 10,100 nurses at West Virginia’s 60 private hospitals. Four state-run hospitals and four veterans’ hospitals run by the federal government are unaffected.

West Virginia joins New Jersey and Washington in banning mandatory overtime. Several other states have debated the issue.

West Virginia Nurses Association member Cheryl Brumfield said the law should help recruitment and ease the state’s shortage of both licensed professional and registered nurses.

“This will help keep students in nursing because they’ll have security that they won’t be stressed beyond their capabilities,” Brumfield said.

The law would not interfere with a hospital’s attempt to manage emergencies such as disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

Nurses who agree to work overtime will be unaffected.