

Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals

1100 E. Hector St., Suite 332

Conshohocken, PA 19428



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Contact: Bill Cruice (610) 567-2907, cell (215) 219-6387, or Lisa Riccardelli (610) 567-2907, cell (215) 219-8105

Nurses Gather to Talk About Changing Pennsylvania Law – Proponents of Staffing Ratios Bill and Ban on Forced Overtime Say They Are Gaining Momentum

Philadelphia, PA – Over 125 registered nurses, concerned that patients are suffering because of unsafe staffing and the forced overtime of nurses in Pennsylvania's Hospitals, met Thursday night at the Adams Mark Hotel in Philadelphia to discuss legislative solutions. Speaking at the event were author Suzanne Gordon, Rep. Ron Raymond (R-Delaware), and Rep. Ron Waters (D-Philadelphia). The event was organized by the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP), the professional union for staff nurses in Pennsylvania.

The bills discussed by the nurses and legislators were HB 489, a bill which would set minimum nurse-to-patient ratios that all Pennsylvania hospitals would be mandated to follow, and a bill to ban forced overtime for nurses. The bill banning forced overtime for nurses has not yet been reintroduced in the Pennsylvania House, though proponents expect it to be introduced in upcoming weeks. The staffing bill was introduced in the house at the end of February. Nurses in California have already won passage of a staffing ratios law that will take effect this summer. They were the first state to pass such a requirement into law.

Representatives Raymond and Waters, both sponsors of the staffing and overtime bills, spoke about the legislation and answered questions from nurses. They urged that issues of safe staffing and forced overtime are not partisan issues, and should be supported by their colleagues. Rep. Ron Waters told the crowd, "This is a non-partisan issue. I've never been to a hospital where I've been asked to fill out a form – are you a Democrat or a Republican? I want nurses to be proud of your profession. I'm going to stand with you to make sure that you get the respect that you deserve."

Teri Evans, president of PASNAP, emphasized the overwhelming support for this legislation among nurses, saying, "I'm glad that we have nurses here from every hospital in Philadelphia and from as far away as Allentown and Bethlehem. Working together we can make sure that these bills become law. Adding that nurses have left the bedside because of the conditions in our hospitals, she said, "There are over 200,000 registered nurses in Pennsylvania. If we improve the conditions in our hospitals, nurses who have left will return to the profession and the bedside."

Rep. Ron Raymond echoed the idea that nurses have to reach out to their legislators and talk to them about staffing and overtime issues. He said that he had been made aware of the importance of these issue when he met with nurses from his district. He added that the hospital industry has a big lobby in Harrisburg, and that nurses must reach out to their legislators and inform them of these issues. He said, "We see about 2,500 bills every year in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. These are good, reasonable bills. And this shouldn't be a partisan issue."

Teri Evans said, "With the implementation of nurse-to-patient ratios in California this summer, the initiative in Pennsylvania and others like it around the country will gain momentum for passage here. It's up to us to make sure that we get similar protections for our patients and ourselves here in Pennsylvania."

PASNAP is a 5,000 member health care union representing nurses at area hospitals including Temple University Hospital, Temple Northeastern Hospital, Crozer Chester Medical Center, Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital and Mercy Suburban Hospital.

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