ADVOCATING FOR SAFE NURSE STAFFING STANDARDS

Note: This resolution was drafted and proposed prior to the successful passage of SB 5263 (2023), which makes several improvements to Washington staffing laws. The 2023 General Assembly approved this resolution with three Resolved clauses to reflect the enactment of that legislation.

WHEREAS, multiple research studies over the past two decades have demonstrated the strong link between inadequate nurse staffing and poor patient outcomes (Pittman, 2022); and

WHEREAS, inadequate staffing has been linked to nurse burnout; and

WHEREAS, inadequate staffing has contributed to many nurses leaving their jobs or leaving nursing altogether; and

WHEREAS, the staffing crisis cannot be resolved without addressing problems of nurse retention; and

WHEREAS, Department of Health data indicates that as many as 16,000 actively licensed RNs in Washington state are not currently working in nursing; and

WHEREAS, nurses’ concerns about the adverse impact of inadequate staffing levels are longstanding but have been exacerbated since the COVID pandemic; and

WHEREAS, California is thus far the only state to enact enforceable minimum safe staffing standards (also known as staffing ratios); and

WHEREAS, several states, including Washington, require hospitals to convene staffing committees to develop staffing plans for each patient care unit and shift; and

WHEREAS, this process has proved insufficient to ensure safe staffing; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 2012, WSNA has advocated for state-required staffing standards to be enacted alongside staffing committees and plans and has continued to advocate for such policy, including through legislation in 2022 and 2023; and

WHEREAS, the American Nurses Association (ANA) in 2022 adopted a position supporting enforceable safe patient standards, including ratios that reflect patient acuity and setting; and

WHEREAS, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), WSNA’s national labor partner, has undertaken efforts to support enactment of staffing ratios at the state and federal levels; and

WHEREAS, healthcare unions in Washington state have successfully negotiated staffing ratios in a small number of hospitals; and
WHEREAS, while inadequate hospital staffing has drawn the most public focus, staffing is also a concern in long-term care, home health, correctional health, public health, outpatient care, school health, and all areas in which nurses practice;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that WSNA will continue to focus on ensuring safe staffing as a top priority in attracting, recruiting and retaining nurses and in providing safe patient care; and be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will advocate for state legislation and policy that includes:
- enforceable, minimum safe staffing standards;
- hospital staffing committees to develop enforceable staffing plans that provide for going above those standards when needed for safe patient care;
- strong enforcement of laws requiring meal and rest breaks and limits on mandatory overtime; and
- clear and effective penalties for employers who fail to comply with minimum standards or staffing plans; be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will continue to work with partners in the labor movement to secure safe staffing; and be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will continue to work with ANA for its visible and active support for minimum safe staffing standards; be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will continue to work with AFT to achieve minimum safe staffing standards; be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will work closely with other C/SNAs and with AFT healthcare affiliates to provide assistance, such as sharing our legislative work to help them in successfully advocating for enforceable safe staffing standards; and be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA also recognizes the need for staffing standards in non-hospital areas of nursing practice; and be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will engage in an active campaign to educate our members on the 2023 staffing law (SB 5236) and how to use it to push effectively for safer staffing; and be it further

RESOLVED, that WSNA will advocate for effective implementation of the 2023 staffing law, including advocacy before state regulatory agencies; and be it further

RESOLVED that WSNA will actively campaign for hospital accountability for safe staffing through, regulation, public and community engagement, bargaining, as well as legislation.
REFERENCES:
https://user-niv7hdi.cld.bz/Report-Evidence-on-Hospital-Staffing-Outcomes-Implications-for-Washington

Submitted by:
Cabinet on Economic & General Welfare on 02-06-2023
WSNA Board of Directors