

Good evening, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Austin Rufener. I work as a staff nurse, charge nurse, and rapid response nurse at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, where I have worked for 7 years. I strongly support House Bill 2697. Thank you for being here and hearing my testimony.

The pediatric intensive care unit is where the sickest children go to receive life saving care and therapies that are available nowhere else. Even before this winter's last surge, and even before the covid-19 pandemic, we often operated at or near capacity. The biggest constraint is not physical bedspace, but the availability of the highly trained and skilled nurses that can provide this care. The training and skills that must be acquired by nurses to be fully competent often takes years after nursing school.

This is why the strains and burden being put on nurses that has led to an enormous level of burnout, moral distress, turnover, and attrition, is of great concern. Because no matter how many new graduates you produce and churn through, if nurses do not stay in the profession, they never gain the skills and knowledge necessary to provide the highest level of care. Just recently, our staff was faced with the possibility of not being able to continue to provide a critically ill patient with a type of dialysis used in the ICU, because no one on the next shift was trained on this advanced therapy. Without this care, the patient would likely die. This was not the only time something like this has happened. It's a situation we have faced with increasing frequency.

While having a staffing law that must actually be followed will require hospitals to make changes to invest in and support their staff, it is possible. It will help stop the hemorrhaging of nurses leaving the profession because they are overworked and distressed. It will support nurses and staff, and it will protect patients. This is why I urge you to support House Bill 2697. Thank you.