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AFT Healthcare

Testimony of
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Labor & Public Employees Committee Hearing
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HB 5257 An Act Hospital Employees and Hospital Conversions

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Lisa D'Abrosca and I am the President of the nurses' union at Lawrence & Memorial hospital. I represent over 500 RNs at L&M, and I am here today to testify in favor of HB 5257 An Act Concerning Hospital Employees and Hospital Conversions.

When I first began creating my testimony, I thought: how is it possible that I can condense all of the emotion and intensity of the last six months into three minutes that will compel you to support this bill? I don't know that I can, but I am here today to try. As I'm sure many of you know, there was a bit of a labor dispute at L&M hospital this past November through December. The main factor precipitating this dispute revolved around L&M Hospital's illegal outsourcing of skilled union healthcare providers. The hospital created a shell corporation called LMPA, and then began outsourcing services to LMPA—basically outsourcing to itself. The impetus behind this illegal action was not to improve patient care or patient satisfaction—it was a plot born out of pure corporate greed. By outsourcing to itself, L&M had essentially come up with a way to cut costs at the expense of patient care. It was simple math to them: hire less skilled employees to do more work for less money. Furthermore, this shell corporation was non-union—thus allowing the corporation to circumvent the union contract and all of the workers' dignity and workers' rights that go along with it. Passage of HB 5257 would prevent activities like this in the future.

As the hospital engaged in illegal practices, we were forced to either stand up or be steamrolled. All we wanted was the fundamental right to go to work and take care of our patients. We had no expectation of 100% job security. That is unreasonable in any environment, especially one as volatile as healthcare. We only wanted to continue doing what we as healthcare workers do best. We have put our heart, our soul--and in many cases--a majority of our life into taking care of our patients. We wanted to be able to take care of them in any environment. If an in-hospital service moved patients to an out-of-hospital setting, we just wanted to follow along. The passage of HB 5257 would allow exactly that.

Our alleged community non-profit hospital's response to our protest was swift and severe. L&M began behaving like the corporate conglomerate that makes us all cringe and shudder when we hear the term "corporate America." Instead of doing the right thing--instead of following the hospital's own mission statement of "improving the health of the region," the corporation running our community hospital did just the opposite. When the workers went on a four day protest strike to oppose the hospital's illegal activity, we were punitively and illegally locked out for 19 more days.

With the passage of this bill, we will never need to worry about a situation like this again. Instead of compromising patient care for the sake of a dollar, this bill will ensure that hospitals will continue to recognize the unions and the rights of the experienced, healthcare providers. The passage of this bill will ensure that staffing levels will remain the same for three years after any conversion--again ensuring that skilled healthcare providers are the ones who are caring for the patients.

In conclusion, no one can guarantee 100% job security in this changing landscape of healthcare. Insistence on such can be a lose-lose for all involved parties, but this bill will put safeguards in place. It will ensure that staffing levels are adjusted for legitimate reasons--not because management has found a new way to treat patients like numbers instead of people. HB 5257 will increase the transparency of hospital conversions by forcing the hospital administration to hold multiple public hearings at which the public can learn about the potential impact of the proposed changes on employment, and the surrounding community. Citizens will finally have the opportunity to hold their non-profit hospital representatives accountable, and ensure that the hospital holds the best interest of the patients and not their own pocketbooks.

With the passage of this bill, situations like the L&M strike and lockout will never have to happen again. Not only would it prevent another L&M catastrophe, it would keep healthcare workers safe and preserve quality patient care statewide. Thank you all for not only your time here today, but all of your support during our time of need.