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Testimony of

Lisa D'Abrosca, RN

President, Lawrence and Memorial Registered Nurses, AFT Local 5049, AFL-CIO

Public Health Committee Hearing

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SB 460 An Act Concerning Hospital Conversions and Other Matters Affecting Hospitals

Good afternoon Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Lisa D'Abrosca. I am the President of the nurses' union, representing more than 500 RNs, at Lawrence and Memorial Hospital. I am here today to testify in favor of SB 460, An Act Concerning Hospital Conversions and Other Matters Affecting Hospitals.

When I first began creating my testimony, I thought: how is it possible that I can condense all of the emotion and the hardship and intensity of the last six months into three minutes. But here I am today to try. As I'm sure you all know, there was a bit of a labor dispute at L&M hospital this past November and December.

The hospital engaged in illegal activities, and we were forced to stand up. We had to stand up for what was right. We were not fighting for better pay or benefits. We were not engaged in an economic battle of any kind. All we wanted was the fundamental right to go to work every day. Did we have unreasonable expectations? Absolutely not. No one can ensure 100% job security in any environment, especially one as volatile as healthcare. What we really wanted was to continue doing what we as healthcare workers have put our heart, our soul, and in many cases a majority of our life into doing--taking care of our patients. We wanted to be able to take care of them in any environment. If an in-hospital service moved to an out-of-hospital setting, we just wanted to follow along.

Instead, our alleged community hospital 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 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, they turned

around, and as a punitive measure, locked us out for 19 days. Instead of improving the health of the region, the corporation decimated the quality of care for the patients, decimated the quality of life for the staff, and decimated the quality of life for the community. The damage that L&M caused to those groups of people will take years to repair, if ever. This, of course, was done all in the name of the almighty dollar.

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, seasoned employees.

As stated before, no one can guarantee 100% job security in this changing landscape of healthcare. But this bill will put safeguards in place to make sure that staffing levels are adjusted for legitimate reasons--not on a whim from management looking to cut costs at the expense of patient care. SB 460 will increase the transparency of hospital conversions by forcing the hospital administration to hold public hearings at which the public can hear about the potential impact of the proposed conversion on employment, and on patient care. People will also have the opportunity to ask questions of the hospital representatives.

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