



Danbury Nurses' Union Unit #47 Local 5047
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Testimony of
Marie Athans, R.N. BC (Behavioral Health)
Danbury Nurses' Union, Unit #47 AFT Local 5047
In support of Raised S. B. 855
An Act Concerning Reports of Nurse Staffing levels
February 23, 2015

My name is Marie Athans and I am a 30 year, bachelor certified behavioral health registered nurse. In my years of experience I have watched staffing deteriorate to extreme insufficient and unsafe levels.

I work the third shift on a two-floor, 22 bed, psychiatric unit. The general staffing is 2 nurses and 1 mental health associate (MHA) or PCT. Sometimes we are only staffed with 2 nurses or 1 nurse and one MHA or PCT. When one staff needs to go to the other floor (leaving 2 or 1 on the main floor) unsafe conditions are created for patients and staff. Staff even has to forfeit their meal breaks so as not to jeopardize the unit.

Our unit has had several serious staff assaults and patient assaults. The behavioral health patient population is more ill than ever yet are provided with less and less service and support (recent proposed cuts made by legislation). In lieu of the tragedies that have occurred related to mental health issues it should be the complete opposite.

Patients now present with even more extreme symptoms that create very unpredictable and tenuous conditions. At times, these conditions warrant 4 staff on our 2 floor unit. We have to plead and practically beg for this staffing and most of the time we are not heard. Management will actually take and reassign the 4th staff person should the hospital be short staffed elsewhere. We are basically told we have to understand.

Of late, through Shared Governance, nurse staffing committees were developed to address the short staffing issue. Two day R.N.'s and I put in long hours and worked very hard at developing staffing grids that identified criteria raising safe patient care and sufficient staff levels. We were thanked for our time and effort but told the grids need to be fiscally sound.

You cannot put a dollar sign on high quality, safe patient care! Sufficient staffing levels need to be developed and maintained at all times for the welfare of all!

Sincerely,

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