



April 9, 2026

Subject: Testimony in Support of H-7031, Joint Resolution Creating a Joint Legislative Study Commission on Safe Staffing in Hospitals — Submitted by a Member of SEIU 1199NE

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services:

I am a nurse and a lactation consultant at Women & Infants Hospital. I have worked at this hospital for 39 years and in my current position for 25 years. I was hired at the height of the last nationwide nursing shortage. I support House Bill 7031 because current staffing levels are the most inadequate I have seen in my entire career, including when I first entered the profession.

One of the guiding principles of nursing care is to act as the patient's advocate. As you watch throughout our nation and see nursing strikes in multiple states, the overriding cause of these strikes is unsafe staffing. Nurses speak up for those who are ill, stressed, weakened, or without agency to speak for themselves.

As a Lactation Consultant, I work with families in the early hours and days of their newborn's life. There is clear and unequivocal research that shows exclusive breastmilk feeding has long term benefits for health and development. What is required to support this feeding goal is enough staff that has ample time to give when families reach out for help. Staffing to census has never taken into consideration how newborns are feeding, what challenges to feeding are present, and what the likely outcome is if these families are not given the support they need.

Our lactation team has been documenting the effects of the shift in staffing ratios from 6 patients per nurse to 8 patients per nurse. We have observed a significant negative impact on our exclusive breastfeeding rates. At the highest point, our rate was 60%; however, it has since declined and is currently less than 30%.

Research shows that up to 25% of newborns risk developing asthma in their early years if they are fed formula while they are in the hospital. Rhode Island is number 5 in our 50 states for the

rate of asthma. Helping these families, providing the staff needed to help them feed at the breast is a long term cost saver. It is better to make an early investment in the health of the newborns of Rhode Island rather than treat chronic health issues. Safe staffing is preventative care for our population. That is why I urge you to establish the Hospital Safe Staffing Commission.

Sincerely,

Nancy Chandley-Adams, RN
Women & Infants Hospital