



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 Registered Nurse at Butler Hospital, where I have worked since 2017. I have been working in the ADI unit, better known as the detox unit, since 2019. I offer this testimony in support of House Bill 7031, creating a special legislative commission to study safe staffing ratios in hospitals.

In my role, I work with patients during some of the most vulnerable and emotional moments of their lives. I assess patients as they come in, often determining whether they are appropriate for detox or need care in another unit. Many are going through withdrawal, struggling to adjust to physical changes while navigating a rollercoaster of emotions, from frustration, to anger, and, at times, reactions that can become physical.

When a patient becomes physical, it requires additional staff to safely intervene, both to protect that patient and to ensure the safety of others on the unit. But that is not easy. We have been punched, hit, and even stabbed. We have had to physically restrain patients while waiting for security, all while other patients witness what is happening.

When we are understaffed, patients wait longer for care. That delay leads to frustration in individuals who are already in crisis and on edge. It does not take much to trigger someone in that state. Often, their reactions are not a choice; they are the result of suffering and unmet needs. Increasing staffing at Butler, and across Rhode Island hospitals, is critical because the safety of both patients and staff depends on it.

Staffing cannot be based on a fixed number on paper. Our environment changes every day, and so do our patients' needs. Staffing must reflect that reality and allow for flexibility. I have a

family to go home to—four children who depend on me. If I am injured at work, I cannot care for them or provide for them.

We are asking you to support this bill, to approve the creation of this commission, and to recognize the needs of those working in Rhode Island hospitals. We have been asking for help for a long time—and too often, it has not come.

Sincerely,

Peter Karmue, RN  
Butler Hospital