



April 28, 2026

Subject: Testimony in Support of S-2258, Joint Resolution Creating a Joint Legislative Study Commission on Safe Staffing in Hospitals — Submitted by a Member of SEIU 1199NE

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services:

I am a Registered Nurse at Butler Hospital, where I have worked since 1999 in a variety of roles. Today, I work the overnight shift on the Kent Unit, which partners with Kent Hospital to care for patients in acute mental health crises. I offer this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 2258.

Working at Butler wasn't just a job for me—it was a calling. My mother worked here for 20 years, and now my son does too. Caring for others is what we do. But in my 25 years at Butler, more than 15 as a nurse, I've watched this job go from difficult to dangerous.

We're told, "you chose this job," and "you knew what you were signing up for." But we didn't sign up to work without adequate staff, without support, or without basic safety. Today, instead of solutions, we're told to "manage" unsafe situations—to just "find a way."

On the Kent Unit, many of our patients come directly from the emergency department, often without being fully screened by a doctor. That means nurses are left in the dark about their condition, their needs, and their level of crisis. Combine that with chronic understaffing, staff floating in who may not be comfortable with the level of care needed, and the requirement to quickly address complex medical and behavioral needs, and you have a perfect storm.

At night, staffing is even lower because management assumes patients will be sleeping. But psychiatric patients don't follow that pattern. They're often awake, in distress, or in crisis. When there are only two nurses and two mental health workers—or sometimes even fewer—responsible for 28 patients, it becomes impossible to provide safe care.

Many of those patients require checks every 5 to 15 minutes. Some may need constant one-on-one observation at times. So I ask you: how is that manageable? How is that safe?

The answer is: it isn't.

This is dangerous for staff, and it's dangerous for every single patient in our care. We are one moment away from a serious, potentially deadly incident.

Safe staffing must be addressed across all Rhode Island hospitals—not just Butler, but every facility in our state. We need to protect healthcare workers, we need to protect patients, and we need the state to step in and ensure that happens.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 2258.

Sincerely,

Amy Smith, RN
Butler Hospital