

WASHINGTON, DC (June 15, 2011) — Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today introduced legislation to address increasing hospital mortality rates and preventable medical errors caused by nurse understaffing. The Nurse Staffing Standards for Patient Safety and Quality Care Act of 2011 would establish a federal minimum standard in all hospitals for direct care registered nurse-to-patient staffing ratios. The bill would greatly improve patient care while helping to restrict the nursing shortage that has left hospitals across the country dangerously understaffed.

“Nurses are overworked and hospitals are understaffed, leading to disastrous results for patients everywhere,” said Representative Jan Schakowsky. “By creating a workplace in which nurses are asked to do the impossible, we drive nurses away and jeopardize the quality of patient care. The bill is a common-sense solution to improve the quality of patient care and address the nursing crisis in our hospitals.”

The Nurse Staffing Standards for Patient Safety and Quality Care Act of 2011 would require that hospitals work with their direct care nurses to develop safe staffing plans that meet but can exceed minimum nurse-to-patient staffing ratios. The legislation would provide whistleblower protection and give nurses the ability to speak out for enforcement of safe staffing standards.

The bill would also require the Department of Health and Human Services to consider staffing requirements for licensed practical nurses and the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission to recommend any changes in additional reimbursement needed due to the requirements of the bill.

A recent study reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (March 17, 2011), found that “when the nursing workload is high, nurses’ surveillance of patients is impaired, and the risk of adverse events increases.” Other studies found that understaffing was a factor in one out of every four unexpected hospital deaths or injuries caused by errors and result in higher incidences of cardiac arrest, pneumonia, urinary tract infections and complications

The legislation is endorsed by the AFL-CIO, the Service Employees International Union, the American Federation of State, Country and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the National Nurses United, the American Federation of Government Employees, the United Steelworkers, and the American Federation of Teachers.

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Contact: Adjoa Adofo, Communications Director
(202) 225-2111
adjoa.adofo@mail.house.gov