



**HOUSE LABOR, INDUSTRIAL AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES  
COMMITTEE**

**JANUARY 11, 2005**

**House Bill 66  
Regulating mandatory overtime for nurses**

**Testimony**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Melby, and I am the Vice President for State Government Relations of the New Hampshire Hospital Association, representing the state's 32 acute care community and specialty hospitals.

At the September 8, 2004 meeting of the Legislative Ad Hoc Committee on Medical Errors & Medical Residents, committee members stated they did not know the extent of the problem of mandatory nursing overtime. As a result, the New Hampshire Hospital Association surveyed our member hospitals to find out whether nursing overtime is required in NH hospitals. No hospital reported requiring any nurse to work overtime, except where there is a situation in which not requiring overtime work could put patients at risk.

But the fact is that requiring overtime rarely occurs. There are two basic reasons for that. One is that many nurses like to volunteer for overtime work because it supplements their income. The second and much more important reason is that the vast majority of nurses are professionals who step forward and volunteer for overtime work in situations where not doing so could present a hardship for their patients or for their nurse colleagues.

Allow me to share with you our perspective on this problem – obviously it's the nursing shortage that's at the heart of the overtime issue. The solution therefore, is to increase New Hampshire's nursing workforce. And here's what's being done about it.

We have an award-winning program entitled, the New Hampshire Nursing Workforce Partnership, a program at the Foundation for Healthy Communities which addresses the shortage of nurses by increasing nursing opportunities in post-secondary educational programs and creating training options to strengthen the skills of practicing nurses.

The project was designed to serve 620 nurses. The Partnership's efforts to encourage collaboration leveraged federal funds and increased the number of participants to over 2,000 New Hampshire nurses. More than \$2.3 million has been committed to support nursing education and local training programs in the past 2 years. This is the largest statewide effort to increase nursing educational opportunities and it has led to new relationships among nursing educators and nurses practicing in acute care, home care, long term care and outpatient care settings.

Forgivable loans of up to \$5,000 per student were provided to 647 nursing students who all signed a commitment to work in New Hampshire upon graduation. Employer-based training was provided to 1,101 registered nurses. Individual training accounts of up to \$2,500 per registered nurse were provided to 89 individuals seeking national nursing specialty certification or seeking RN re-entry training.

In addition, 50 nurses with baccalaureate degrees received funding toward getting a masters degree by making a commitment to teach in New Hampshire nursing programs. This will assist in developing the capacity of New Hampshire nursing programs to meet the demand to serve more students by increasing the pool of qualified nursing faculty. If mandatory overtime for nurses is a problem in New Hampshire, it must be a problem somewhere other than in hospitals.

In addition, grant proposal has been submitted to the President's High Growth Job Training Initiative designed to increase the number of baccalaureate-degreed nurses in New Hampshire by building capacity within UNH to offer accelerated nursing core curriculum in 2-day courses over 12-week terms.

These initiatives will help not only with recruitment, but retention of nurses as well.

Since there's no problem regarding mandatory overtime in hospitals, we see no need for this legislation. Solutions regarding the issue of patient care to be cared for by an adequate and well-trained nursing workforce are being pursued and supported, as I just described.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.