

SB 637 Ensuring Quality Patient Care During Public Health Emergencies

Senator Josh Newman

SUMMARY

SB 637 will require general acute-care hospitals (GACHs) in California to report levels of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as N95 masks, gloves, eye protection, gowns, air purifiers, and testing supplies, to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) on a daily basis during any health-related state of emergency proclaimed by the Governor of California or the President of the United States. The bill also will require GACH's to report staffing shortages and publicly post notices of any nurse-to-patient ratio waivers in effect directly adjacent to a hospital's license.

By enacting these straightforward requirements, SB 637 will ensure the provision of necessary information to policy makers while also protecting frontline nurses and health care workers, their patients and our communities.

ISSUE

In periods of elevated risk to public health such as the current pandemic, ensuring sufficient PPE supplies and reasonable nurse-to-patient ratios is crucial to the safety and well-being of patients, nurses and other essential staff.

Throughout the pandemic, hospitals have faced shortages of all types of PPE — from gowns to gloves to N95 masks. Health care workers continually have been asked to reuse potentially contaminated PPE, such as N95 masks. Ensuring visibility into a hospital's ongoing inventory of PPE will provide a much-needed level of transparency and assurance to health care workers who are being asked to perform tasks that put health and even lives at risk.

Further, in response to unprecedented demand for emergency health care services during the pandemic, California has permitted hospitals to apply for waivers to California's existing statutory nurse-to-patient staffing requirements, resulting in nurses having to deliver care in situations in which the number of patients

per nurse are above the ratios permitted by existing law. California's nurse-to-patient ratio laws have been proven to result in better patient outcomes than in states without safe staffing laws. During the pandemic, the issuance of waivers has resulted in increases in the workload of already overburdened nurses. Considering the implications for patient and workplace safety, health care workers as well as the community at-large should have ready access to all relevant information on nurse-to-patient ratios in the hospitals in which they are working or seeking care.

SOLUTION

SB 637 will ensure that hospitals are transparent about PPE inventory, staffing levels, and nurse-to-patient ratio waivers. The data that hospitals provide to CDPH will allow policymakers, nurses, and health care workers to prepare and to plan so that the state's front-line health care workers will be as protected from unnecessary risk of illness as possible. Additionally, this bill will help safeguard the progress California has made to date toward improving hospital work environments in order to provide quality care to patients. SB 637 stipulates that CDPH may issue fines and penalties in response to violations, and may suspend, revoke or refuse to renew the license of a GACH if the hospital fails to comply with these reasonable reporting requirements.

SUPPORT

California Nurses Association (Sponsor)

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California Nurses Association

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