



September 16, 2021

Secretary Mark Ghaly, MD
California Health and Human Services Agency
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Ghaly,

Health care workers are facing our most difficult working conditions in generations with the severe impacts from stress, grief, and short staffing. Recently, the California Hospital Association (CHA) sent your Office a letter. We agree with their characterization of the problem inside our hospitals, but not with many of their solutions. As CHA notes, we are in the "worst staffing shortage since the beginning of the pandemic" and that COVID-19 has taken a "devastating physical and emotional toll" on health care workers, many of whom have "reached their breaking point." All this creates a dire situation for patients for the current and future surges.

Unfortunately, the hospital industry prioritized their pandemic profits over addressing this shortage when the industry vigorously fought AB 650 (Muratsuchi), which would have recognized health care workers for their heroic service and provided incentives to keep people on the job serving patients. Had AB650 passed, hospitals would be paying bonuses to trained health care workers who stay on the job, rather than getting gouged by staffing agencies. Unfortunately, they took a short-sighted, profit-driven position and now they want taxpayers to pay for it.

Focus first on retaining current workers

The hospital industry is asking for the State to pay for their travel staffing because of their failures to plan for how to retain workers. The State should not prioritize paying travel staff over incentivizing current employees. The industry is hoarding tens of billions in reserves and many hospitals are still paying excessive executive compensation. In addition, according to the California Health Care Foundation, California hospitals made \$3.47 billion in net income in 2020. New State funding must first prioritize workers who stayed on the job during the pandemic and not compensate health systems paying CEOs millions and keeping billions in the bank.

Additionally, by CHA's own admission in their letter, "travel staff have in many cases been untested, unprepared, or unwilling to do the work required." It makes little sense for the State to invest in travel staff instead of focusing on retaining the current qualified health care workforce to ensure that quality of care is not compromised.

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Instead of using State resources to pay for travel staff as CHA is requesting, we would propose that the State act to retain California's current health care workforce and encourage health care workers back to our hospitals by providing retention bonuses to health care workers who are doing their best to hold the line.

Keep strong patient care protections

One solution proposed by CHA that should not be embraced is the suspension of California Department of Public Health (CDPH) investigations and enforcement. This would give hospitals a blank check to continue unsafe practices that jeopardize patients and workers. Too many hospitals have been inconsistent in applying CDPH visitation guidelines, are undermining basic levels of safe staffing and are spotty in their enforcement of safety standards. CDPH is already focusing investigations and enforcement on the most severe infractions, and for the CHA to propose weakening enforcement further is irresponsible. Patients and workers are at greater risk than ever before and they deserve the protection of aggressive CDPH enforcement.

There is a desperate workforce crisis in our hospitals. The answer is to recognize, support, and retain the caregivers who have been working through the pandemic, not to bail out hospital executives, prop up staffing agencies, and jeopardize patient safety by foregoing inspections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Regan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "D" and "R".

Dave Regan
President

cc: Governor Gavin Newsom
Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
Senate Pro Toni Atkins