

**April 22, 2019**

Re: Healthcare Worker Meal and Rest Breaks

Dear Honorable Members of the Washington State House and Senate:

We are writing you today to express our firm support for the nurses, nursing assistants, surgical technologists, and other front-line hospital workers who are trying to achieve the most basic of workers’ rights – access to uninterrupted meal and rest breaks, and basic protections against abusive, unmitigated mandatory overtime.

Workers in healthcare settings work demanding, physical jobs, and provide critical care to us and our families during some of the most challenging times of our lives. In emergency rooms and intensive care units, in cancer wards and in psychiatric care, these workers take care of us and our loved ones when we are vulnerable. The fact that these workers are denied practical access to meal and rest breaks, and are regularly forced to work overtime, is shameful. And it is unbelievable that it is such a challenge to protect these workers who have done so much for the rest of us when so many other states have secured these protections.

When you consider further versions of this policy, we ask that you **reject efforts to deny workers at Critical Access Hospitals these basic rights. You should further reject efforts to deny non-nursing, front line staff these rights as well.** Of the twenty states who have adopted similar protections for healthcare workers, none of them punish workers in Critical Access Hospital or rural settings, and techs working alongside nursing staff and under the same conditions cannot be treated as though they are less valid than nurses. We should not be the first state to say that some rural workers, patients and communities matter less than others. Whether we are seeking care at our community hospital, or in another community as we are passing through, we need to know that those workers providing our care are as rested, and respected, as we expect ourselves to be at our own workplaces.

As we face our own mortality, or when we welcome our children in to this world, we need our caregivers to be rested and performing their critical work at the best of their ability every time. As patients, during surgeries, during the examination of an x-ray, during a challenging pregnancy’s difficult delivery, or during a crisis in an emergency room, our lives are at risk. As tax payers who support these hospitals, we expect our investment to provide the best possible care. As residents of this State, it’s scary to see hospital employers working so hard to deny so many such basic rights.

Please do the right thing, and pass a healthcare worker break and overtime bill that honors and respects the workers who do so much for the rest of us. Reject efforts to amend the bill that treats one set of workers differently than their coworkers, and ensure that all healthcare workers, in all hospitals – rural and urban – are treated with dignity and respect.

Thank you for your consideration.

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