



April 21st, 2023

Professional Distinction

Personal Dignity

Patient Advocacy

Chair Liz Olson
Members of the Ways and Means Committee
Minnesota State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Olson and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

With 22,000 members, the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) represents 80 percent of all active bedside hospital nurses in Minnesota and is the largest voice for professional nursing in the state. We are a leader in nursing, labor, health care and social justice communities and a voice for nurses and patients on issues relating to the professional, economic, and general well-being of nurses and in promoting the health and well-being of the public.

The following are some provisions included in the HF2930, the Health Finance and Policy Omnibus bill, which we support:

Provisions from HF 1700 Keeping Nurses at the Bedside Act

Our hospitals are in crisis with patients waiting for hours and even days in our emergency departments; being boarded and not receiving appropriate care; or receiving that care in unsuitable and undignified spaces such as hallways and the waiting room of emergency departments. This inappropriate type of care is perpetuating thousands more registered nurses leaving the bedside due to incredible stress, physical assaults, and the moral injury they sustain when they do not have the resources and time to provide the care their patients deserve. These provisions included in the omnibus bill provide nurses and other healthcare workers a voice in staffing in their hospitals through a comprehensive, local, and flexible approach to ensure patients are receiving the best care from their nurses. The omnibus bill also includes multiple other recruitment and retention solutions such as workplace violence prevention and loan forgiveness programs. We applaud Chair Lieblich and the Health committee’s inclusion of these important steps to bring nurses back to the bedside and help solve the crisis in our hospitals.

Hospital Merger Regulation and HMO Conversion Moratorium

MNA is proud to support the provisions from House File 402 included in the omnibus bill because it provides the Attorney General and Department of Health with the authorities and tools desperately needed to protect patients,

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communities, healthcare workers, and our state healthcare delivery system from the harms caused by consolidation and corporatization. We know that nationally, regionally, and right here in Minnesota, corporatization leads to vital services being stripped from rural and lower-income communities and shuttled to larger facilities further and further away. Consolidation raises prices, lowers accessibility, and has negative longstanding impacts on patients and communities. This provision establishes new safeguards at the state level for preventing harmful mergers and transactions and outlines a comprehensive and data-informed approach for ensuring that only transactions that would provide for the public good can move forward, while also preventing charitable assets from being transferred to a for-profit entity. The bill also extends the moratorium on health maintenance organization (HMO) conversions and authorizes a study on regulating nonprofit and for-profit HMO transactions to ensure Minnesotans have quality products available for their health insurance that best match the needs of our state.

MN Health Plan Study

MNA strongly supports the provisions for a study that examines the costs and benefits of a universal healthcare system, in comparison with the current public and private healthcare financing system. In other countries with some form of public healthcare financing, costs to patients and taxpayers are far lower, and health outcomes are better. We support this study to show how a public healthcare system in Minnesota would compare to our current patchwork of public and private insurance. In our current complicated, expensive, and inefficient system, too many Minnesotans are underinsured; rationing medications; delaying or skipping care due to cost; and going into debt or even bankruptcy due to healthcare bills. Minnesotans deserve to know what our healthcare could look like if the profit motive of insurance, hospital corporations and pharmaceutical companies was removed, and resources were invested into actual care.

Opting Out of Managed Care Plans

We are excited to see meaningful reform to our public health options to ensure that enrollees have choices in the care they receive through being able to opt out of managed care plans. MNA's strong support of public programs is, in part, rooted in deep concerns about the impact of privatization which forces individuals to enroll into HMO plans that are not demonstrated to improve the quality-of-care people receive. Instead, data shows that HMO plans profit by reducing access to providers, increasing denials for medically necessary services, and removing individuals' ability to make their own healthcare decisions. This system further removes transparency from the process and requires publicly funded programs to pay private insurance companies to manage these important benefits without ensuring they are improving the quality of patient care and healthcare access.

Eligibility for Undocumented Individuals and Continuous Enrollment

We also express our support for continuous eligibility for Medicaid coverage and including undocumented individuals in coverage for MN Care. All Minnesotans deserve access to affordable and accessible healthcare regardless of income and immigration status. Our state saves money and lives when we provide healthcare to everyone. Continuous eligibility ensures that individuals and families who are already enrolled in Medicaid do not lose coverage due to administrative hurdles or minor fluctuations in income, and that the youngest Minnesotans in the state have consistent access to healthcare coverage. Thank you for your work to support a better healthcare system.

Repealing Productive Injustice Act

We know that most Minnesotans support access to full reproductive healthcare options and for individuals to have autonomy over medical decisions affecting them. MNA's own stance reflects support of this position as well. Unfortunately, there are many laws in place that prevent full access to healthcare. Nurses see the results of these policies regularly in their own profession. The barriers listed above often result in more serious healthcare issues which burden our already understaffed emergency departments and hospitals. As Minnesota begins to see an increase in patients coming from bordering states to receive reproductive care, it will even further exacerbate this issue. Now is the time for Minnesota to remove these harmful policies and ensure that we continue to be a leader in providing equitable healthcare, access and support for those in need. For the health, safety, and economic well-being of patients and nurses across the state, we strongly support this provision.

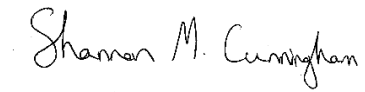
Telehealth

The pandemic revealed more clearly both the inequities in the health care system and the possibility of new technology to help more people access care. As MNA works through this language more closely, we want to ensure that telehealth does not replace individualized care at the bedside and that lack of local broadband infrastructure and economic barriers to accessing necessary equipment and internet service do not exacerbate health care issues that already exist in Minnesota.

Just as patients depend on nurses to care for them at the bedside, Minnesotans across the state are counting on legislators to ensure they have access to quality, affordable care. The overall focus on ensuring better access to healthcare is incredible and we strongly support this work to ensure our healthcare system functions better for all Minnesotans.

We appreciate and are grateful for the work and passion put into this omnibus bill and look forward to working with you all over the next weeks to continue building on this critical piece of legislation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon M. Cunningham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shannon M. Cunningham
Direction of Community and Government Relations
Minnesota Nurses Association