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Good morning, My name is Alexandria Willis. I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health division of Health Policy and Administration. I am a licensed practical nurse of three years and am currently employed at a nursing and rehabilitation center on the City's Southside. I would like to thank Governor Pat Quinn for creating this Nursing Home Safety Task Force to help ensure the safety of Illinois seniors. Illinois nursing homes have been under fire from the media, specifically the Chicago Tribune and Chicago Reader. I sincerely wish that these stories were sensationalized but the sad fact is our seniors are in danger.

The Illinois government has been making major efforts to increase the safety of nursing home residents. For example, House Bill 2531, signed by former Governor Rod Blagojevich requires that healthcare facilities initiate a criminal history record for all employees, besides physicians, that have contact with residents, access to their living quarters or access to their financial, medical, or personal records. However this did not address the quality of care resident receive or staffing ratios.

The current federal law is that nursing homes must have "sufficient nursing staff and provide nursing and related services to attain or maintain the highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being of each resident, as determined by resident assessments and individual plans of care." This is echoed in the Illinois Nursing Home Act with the addition that each nursing home shall "establish staffing rations which shall specify the number of staff hours per resident of care." This has been broken down to about 1.7-2.5 hours of care per resident per day.

Having worked in a nursing home environment for three years I can tell you that the current law is the reason why in 2000 only 21% of Chicago Nursing homes were within full or substantial compliance with federal nursing home standards. As a nurse I'm responsible for at times more than 30 residents with an average of about 3-5 medications per person, not including gastric feeding tubes, tracheotomy care, wound care, and activities of daily living. The Certified Nursing Assistants at times have between 10 and 30 residents they are responsible for feeding, dressing, cleaning, changing, and assisting with repositioning. By allowing nursing home owners and/or administrators to decide what "sufficient staffing" is I has placed Illinois seniors in danger.

In 2000, U.S Representatives Jan Schakowsky, Bobby Rush, and former Rep. and governor Blagojevich introduced the Quality Care for Nursing Home patients Act, House resolution 5166. This act would guarantee adequate staffing ratios at nursing homes receiving Medicare or Medicaid funding. I would like to highlight the recommended staffing ratios of this Act.

- The minimum level of direct care staff-RN, LPN, or CNA during; day shift 1 for every 5 residents, evening shift 1 for every 10 residents, night shift 1 for every 15 residents.
- The minimum level of licensed nurses-RN, LPN during; day shift 1 for every 15 residents, evening shift 1 for every 20 residents, night shift 1 for every 30 residents.

Unfortunately this bill died in the Illinois House of Representatives.

I am here to ask this task force to revisit H.R 5166 The Quality Care for Nursing Home Patients Care Act. This Act clearly laid out minimum staffing ratios that would ensure residents receive the best care based on recommendations made by the Harvard Nursing Research Institute, National Citizen's Coalition on Nursing Home reform, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, and others. Thank you.