



Alaska State Legislature

Representative Peggy Wilson
House District 2

SPONSOR STATEMENT HB 50

"An Act relating to limitations on overtime for registered nurses and licensed practical nurses in health care facilities and providing for an effective date."

Nurses are working excessive amounts of hours without adequate rest. This creates an unsafe work environment for patients and nurses. Mandatory overtime is one of the main reasons nurses leave nursing. Recent studies indicate that one in five nurses is considering leaving the profession. When polled on their reasons for leaving, mandatory overtime is always listed in the top ten. The purpose of HB 50 is to promote better patient and nurse safety and to create an environment that will keep nurses at the bedside.

HB 50 would prohibit mandatory overtime. Mandatory overtime hours are those hours above an agreed upon, predetermined, regularly scheduled shift, which the employer makes compulsory (as opposed to voluntary). The threat of reprisals includes but is not limited to discharge, discipline, demotion or assignment to unattractive tasks or work shifts or in some cases licensure removal, retaliatory reporting, and charges of "patient abandonment".

The bill does not ban overtime. The bill allows nurses to work up to 14 consecutive hours, but then requires a rest period of at least 10 hours. Another provision provides a nurse cannot be forced to work more than 80 hours in a 14-day period. Nurses can voluntarily agree to exceed the 80-hour limit, so long as they don't work more than 14 consecutive hours without the 10-hour rest period.

HB 50 allows for a number of exceptions to these requirements, including school nurses on field trips, nurses working on medivac flights, and if needed, for an unforeseen emergency that could jeopardize patient safety such as natural disasters or disease outbreaks.

There are 15 other states that have adopted similar requirements, including Washington, Oregon and California. Most of these versions restrict nurses to only 12 consecutive hours, with a mandated rest period of 12 hours. HB 50 extended those requirements to a 14-hour limit with a 10-hour rest period to provide additional flexibility to our hospitals, particularly those operating in smaller communities.

HB 50 addresses these problems in a reasonable and balanced manner, while making a work environment safer. It will also help to retain nurses instead of giving them reason leave the state or retire early.