

NETWORK

A PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN FEDERATION OF NURSES & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, LOCAL 5000, AFT, AFL-CIO

CODE RED: From Crisis to Action in Wisconsin

by Jamie Lucas, Executive Director

Unions are going to save healthcare from collapse. In fact, it's already happening. More and more healthcare workers are coming together to join and build powerful unions. Across the country, our union siblings are delivering enforceable safe staffing laws and calling 'Code Red' on the manufactured healthcare staffing crisis. We're fighting right alongside them here in Wisconsin, from Antigo to Burlington, Cumberland to Milwaukee, and everywhere in between. **We can win if we fight together.** Oregon, Connecticut, and Washington have passed safe staffing laws this year, and other states (including ours) are considering similar proposals. **So, are you with us?**

Recently, our national union highlighted our work in Wisconsin. Here's what we had to say, then read the rest of this newsletter to find ways to help other healthcare workers organize unions, support your fellow WFNHP members in winning strong contracts, and get the *Wisconsin Nurse Staffing and Patient Protection Act* passed into law. **We must organize, bargain, and pass statewide laws if we're going to brighten our future.**

The goal of the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (WFNHP) Code Red campaign



Photo by Wisconsin Examiner

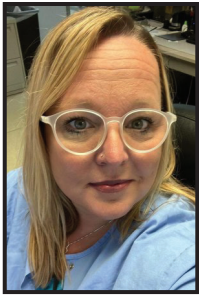
WFNHP President, Connie Smith, speaks at a press conference at the State Capitol on 9/13/23, introducing the WI Nurse Staffing and Patient Protection Act.

is to engage healthcare workers in healing our healthcare system and making it sustainable again—which our members and our patients desperately need. The corporate model of healthcare prizes the bottom line over the frontlines and over patient safety. It has driven healthcare workers to the breaking point. The pandemic lit healthcare on fire, laying bare its structural issues and demonstrating just how unsafe and unsustainable corporate healthcare's "do more with less" approach is.

For years, our members have worked under grueling conditions, increasingly unable to care for their patients in the way they signed up to do. We've heard stories of those who left the bedside because workplace stress threatened their health. Commonly, members work 12-hour shifts without being able to take bathroom or meal breaks. And some have been unable to refuse unsafe assignments for fear of discipline or termination. The extent to which healthcare workers, and nurses specifically, are asked to absorb more responsibilities and forgo a personal life or work-life balance is frightening. Administrators claim it's necessary because of a pandemic-driven staffing shortage—but in truth, the shortage is a direct result of years of corporate decisions made to increase profit.

In December 2022, the *New York Times* investigated one of our employers, Ascension, which operates St. Francis Hospital in Milwaukee.* Ascension has been cutting staff since taking over the hospital in 2017—cutting our bargaining unit in half by 2020 and closing labor and delivery services in late 2022—and awarding millions in executive bonuses for keeping labor costs low. St. Francis serves primarily Black and Latinx communities, and these decisions just worsen the acute inequities that exist in Milwaukee, where segregation and inequality are rampant.

(continued on page 4)



We Care for Others, Who Cares for Us?

by Connie Smith, President

We hear this all the time: maintain a healthy diet and get adequate sleep and exercise, limit media exposure, avoid or limit caffeine and use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to cope. On every flight we take we hear. 'Put your oxygen mask on yourself first.' But, how do we do it when we work 12+ hour shifts, and above our FTE multiple times a work schedule, while our employers continue to say they cannot afford to hire to safe staffing standards as they continue to make record profits.

At WFNHP, we know how to do it! As a UNION we advocate for ourselves, our profession, and other co-workers at the bargaining table. THAT IS SELF CARE! But, it doesn't stop there. If we can't get what we need at the bargaining table (or even if we have gotten it), we continue to fight for our patients and ALL healthcare workers through legislation. Now is the time to get the State of Wisconsin to recognize that patients and healthcare workers NEED safe staffing ratios, time for family and self care (with no mandatory overtime), and appropriate staff around us to make our hospitals safe for our patients and its workers.

With that being said...I want to introduce you to our new campaign for safe staffing—CODE RED: From Crisis to Action. This legislation will give nurses and other healthcare workers the tools we need to provide the kind of care our patients have needed and what we've always wanted to provide them.

We no longer want to have to "fit in" self care; we have to bake it into our lives like the eggs that make chocolate cake better.

Let's do for ourselves what our employers won't do for us. THIS IS A CALL TO ACTION! Soon I will be asking you to send me a picture of yourself with a sign (*coming soon*) that tells me and everyone what safe staffing means to you. I have already asked you to write your legislators about safe staffing legislation—SB-470. We will also be looking for people who would be willing to testify at legislative hearings on this bill. I can't wait to call and hear you say 'YES' to telling everyone (shout it from the mountain top) why safe staffing ratios for nurses and all healthcare workers are important and NEED TO BE PASSED. And, why mandatory overtime is unsafe—not just for you, but for your patients too.

Let's review...FIRST AND FOREMOST—PUT YOURSELF FIRST! That may sound selfish to some, but if you don't put yourself first, how do you care for family



and your patients? Until our work is done and SB-470 safe staffing legislation is passed (and you can have more work-life balance), we will have to continue to:

- **Exercise**—maybe just a walk around the block either at home or at work.
- **Hydrate**—drink water; take a bottle with you everywhere you go.
- **Make time for things you enjoy**—sometimes it's as easy as sitting quietly alone with candles burning, a movie, or date night.
- **Rest**—please try to get a minimum of 6-8 hours of sleep. If you have language in your contract, enforce your rest period.
- **Self compassion**—don't be hard on yourself when things aren't always the way you want them to be.
- **Be gracious**—our co-workers are going through some of the same struggles.
- **Stay connected to others**—make sure you keep those close to you close.

These all seem simple, but can take time we already feel we don't have because of the exhaustion we are all feeling post Covid. This will continue until we get SB-470 passed. Nike said it best—JUST DO IT!

I want to end with a message from one of my favorite TV shows, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart...“How can I help?” Email me at president@wfnhp.org or text my personal phone 414-975-9412. I don't have all the answers, but together we can go from CRISIS TO ACTION.

THE WISCONSIN NURSE STAFFING AND PATIENT PROTECTION ACT

THIS BILL WOULD REQUIRE SAFE STAFFING LEVELS BY:

- ◆ **Establishing statewide, enforceable minimum nurse-to-patient ratios** and requiring each hospital to submit a staffing plan to DHS.
- ◆ Requiring **each hospital** to create a **nurse staffing committee** to create their staffing plan, with at least **a simple majority made up of non-supervisory direct-care registered nurses**.
- ◆ Mandating that **hospitals submit** to the Department of Health Services (DHS) and **publicly post their staffing plan**.
- ◆ Ensuring hospitals **include support staff levels in their facility staffing plans** that are **informed by the direct care staff themselves**.

PROTECT NURSES, HEALTHCARE WORKERS, AND PATIENTS BY:

- ◆ **Banning mandatory overtime** (with very limited exceptions), providing a predictable schedule and improved work-life balance to our nursing workforce.
- ◆ Allowing nurses to **refuse any unsafe work assignment** they believe in their own professional judgment would compromise patient safety or their nursing license.
- ◆ **Limiting** the mandated **length of any shift to 12 hours in any 24-hour period** unless the nurse wanted to work longer.
- ◆ **Forbidding any hospital from retaliating against a staff member** who exercises any of the rights enumerated in the bill.



CODE RED... *from page 1*

Now that the worst of the pandemic is past, health-care workers also have a decision to make. Do we normalize the deterioration of our working conditions? Or do we fight to make healthcare the way it ought to be?

WFNHP decided to fight.

Wisconsin has no meaningful staffing regulations in place to keep healthcare workers safe. So this fall, we introduced legislation that establishes enforceable staffing ratios created by nurses and direct care staff. It includes a penalty for employers that violate their staffing plans, which will be established in accordance with a committee of direct care providers who work in the hospitals. And it doesn't allow employers to use overtime as a tool to avoid staffing ratios—the bill bans mandatory overtime for nurses and asserts nurses' right to refuse unsafe assignments.

Now, we're advocating for the bill, SB470 and persuading legislators to give it a hearing. That decision is controlled by the committee chairs, who generally work along party lines. But we believe this bill deserves bipartisan support. The Senate Health Committee chair, a Republican nurse practitioner, has a clinic outside of the insurance industry and well understands the problems with corporate healthcare. So we hope she's responsive to the work we're doing to demonstrate the need for safe staffing legislation.

In addition to this legislative push, we're fighting to make quality care widely available to all people and to actively involve community members in decisions about the services offered in their areas. We have partnered with local groups in a coalition to restore needed surgical and labor and delivery services to Milwaukee, which Ascension closed in 2018 and 2022, and we're continuing this coalition building to ensure that our communities can access the care they need.

We're also taking advantage of organizing opportunities throughout Wisconsin, as more nurses and healthcare workers are looking to seize their power and take back control within their hospitals to be able to do their jobs safely. Our message is really resonating with people because the problems with the healthcare system are now clearer than ever. Instead of just complaining that healthcare is broken, we're fighting for solutions that center patients' and healthcare workers' well-being.

It's healthcare workers, not administrators, who go home at the end of each day wondering whether we did everything we could for our patients. So we are infinitely more qualified than hospital CEOs to fix

what's wrong at the bedside, on our floors, in our labs, and in the system more broadly. We are in a moment of incredible optimism and opportunity, and we're making the most of it: we're pushing forward in hope and leading with a vision of the way healthcare can—and should—be.



Safe staffing saves lives, that much is simple. But the efforts to enact safe staffing legislation aren't so simple. Let's dig into some trends and lessons learned, as well as some quick facts about our bill in Wisconsin.

Who generally supports safe staffing laws?

- Nurses, nursing assistants, techs, service workers and other direct care healthcare workers, both union and non-union
- Patient advocacy groups
- Researchers, including academic and workforce engineering specialists
- Pro-labor groups

Who generally opposes safe staffing laws?

- Hospital associations
- Healthcare executives
- Nurse managers
- Pro-business groups

Why do these groups argue against safe staffing laws when the people actually providing patient care argue for them?

- Generally, it comes down to two main things: cost and control.
 - **Cost:** Labor costs make up a significant chunk of a hospital's overall costs. If they have to pay more healthcare workers, their costs go up, obviously. Legislation requiring a certain number of workers precludes management from continuing the trend of putting more and more work on fewer and fewer workers, which saves money.
 - **Control:** The Wisconsin Hospital Association called our bill a "one-size-fits-all" approach to staffing and said that hospitals need "flexibility" to address staffing.

Don't take the bait on these arguments.

- Corporate healthcare has proven their staffing models don't fit healthcare workers or patients. Employers have had free reign to figure out and prevent the current staffing crisis, but their business models have not adequately improved retention or job satisfaction for healthcare workers, or the cost or safety of care in our state.
- When an employer says they want "flexibility," it always means "we need to be able to assign more patients to our workers." Always. After all, our bill would establish minimum standards, meaning ratios can always be better than the bare minimum, but never worse.
- Even a hospital CEO in Pennsylvania and the American Nurses Association have come around to supporting safe staffing minimums!

What can we do to set safe staffing standards in Wisconsin?

- 1) Write to and speak with your legislator. Start by scanning our QR code below to use our simple, fast letter writing tool online! Reach out to jlucas@wfnhp.org if you want to set up a conversation with your elected officials.
- 2) Use your voice by talking to your coworkers, friends, and families. Testify at a committee hearing, if and when the time comes. Share your experiences in these ways, then watch as others become inspired by your actions.
- 3) Participate in bargaining at your hospital. You don't need a law to set these standards in your workplace. While none of our employers have agreed to ratios yet in a contract, they always could agree to it if we leverage that demand.
- 4) Help your healthcare friends form unions and invite them to get involved in our campaign! We are more powerful together than alone, and acting together will be the only way we can win the change we need for healthcare workers, patients, and our communities.



Scan me to write your legislator for safe staffing!



Scan me to get involved in other ways!

Ready for Change: Working People are Fed up and Fired Up

Earlier this month, we witnessed the largest healthcare strike in the history of this country, as 75,000 Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers across the US withheld their labor for 3 days to underscore their demands for better pay and safer staffing in their new contract. Healthcare workers aren't the only ones rising up en masse to build a better world, though.

Thousands of United Auto Workers members are in the midst of a historic strike to demand a fair contract with their employers, the big three automakers of GM, Ford, and Stellantis, after those companies saw record profits. The union has made it clear that record profits must equal a record contract. Without labor, there is no product, after all, and the executives of these companies have received outlandish raises. It's only fair that the workers receive the same. (Sound familiar?)

Across industries, workers are ready for change. Such impressive collective actions are inspiring. They must be celebrated and supported, as our fights are undoubtedly intertwined. That's why WFNHP members joined the UAW's picket lines recently in Milwaukee. Go to www.uaw.org to show your support. You can also reach out to us at any time to get plugged into solidarity actions across our state.



WFNHP joined the picket line in solidarity with members of UAW Local 75 on strike at the Stellantis Mopar plant in Milwaukee, WI on October 5, 2023.

OFFICIAL NOTICE:

Nomination & Election of WFNHP-Local 5000 Officers/Delegates



It's time to nominate and elect the Officers who will lead our union for the next two years; the delegates who will represent our union at the 2024 American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Conventions; and the delegates who will represent our union at the monthly meetings of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council (MALC).

Officers to be Elected:

President—the leader and official spokesperson of the organization. Responsible for running meetings, setting policy, and creating vision and direction for our union. The President also works in close consultation with the Executive Director, to make sure members' needs are being met.

Executive Vice President—assists the President in all delegated tasks and will assume the duties of the President in the event of their absence.

Treasurer—responsible for overseeing the finances of the organization and maintaining membership records.

Secretary—responsible for recording minutes of all meetings and assisting with necessary correspondence.

(3) At-Large Vice Presidents—whose duties are assigned by the President or Executive Board.

Term of Office: January 1, 2024-December 31, 2025
Elected Officers will assume office on January 1 of even numbered years and will serve a two-year term. These (7) elected Officers will make up the Executive Board of Local 5000 and be required to meet at least (4) times each year.

Delegates to be Elected:

(6) delegates to the 2024 American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Convention. The President is an automatic delegate, therefore, **5** additional delegates are to be elected. The AFT Convention will be held July 22-25, 2024 in Houston, Texas. The number of delegates whose expenses will be fully paid will be determined when we set next year's budget. Delegates must attend on their own time.

(4) delegates to the 2024 Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Convention. The President is an automatic delegate, therefore, **3** additional delegates are to be elected. The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Convention is tentatively scheduled for the end of September 2024. The number of delegates whose expenses will be fully paid by WFNHP will be determined when we set next year's budget. Delegates must attend on their own time.

(10) delegates to the Milwaukee Area Labor Council (MALC). The Labor Council meets on the first Wednes-

day of every month at 6:30pm at 633 S. Hawley Rd. in Milwaukee. MALC delegates will have the same two-year term of office as Local 5000 Officers.

Nomination Procedure:

In order to run for office, one must have been a member in good standing (dues-paying member) of Local 5000 for at least three (3) months. You may nominate yourself or other members you believe will be the best team to lead our union for the next two years. To nominate individuals, you must submit their name(s) on the **official nomination form on page 7.** (Please have a conversation with the individuals you intend to nominate, to make sure they are willing to run for the position prior to turning in your nomination form.) **PLEASE NOTE:** **There will be no write-in candidates on the final ballot, so only those nominated using the formal nomination process will be considered nominated. Nominations must be received by the union office no later than 5pm on November 10, 2023.**

Nominations will be reviewed by the Election Committee. All approved nominees will be notified and will be required to complete a Consent to Serve Form in order for their name to appear on the ballot. **Consent to Serve Forms must be returned to the union office no later than 5pm on November 17, 2023.**

IMPORTANT: Only candidates with opposition and who have turned in a completed Consent to Serve Form will appear on the ballot. In the event there is only one candidate nominated for a position, they will be considered automatically "elected" after review by the Election Committee and will take office 1/1/2024. If there is no nomination received for a position, that position will remain vacant and be filled after 1/1/2024 by the Local Executive Board.

Candidates with opposition may request from the WFNHP office contact information for the statewide membership so that they may equally and fairly campaign. They will also be allowed one (1) observer of their choice to observe the election process (at each location), absentee ballot mailing, and final ballot tallying in Milwaukee.

Election Information:

In accordance with the WFNHP constitution and bylaws, the election of Local Officers will take place in odd-numbered years during the Fall Membership Meeting.

Eligible Voters: Only full dues paying members in good standing are eligible to vote. However, if you are not currently a member, you can become a member and vote before or on election day. If you work for an employer with payroll deduction for union dues, you must sign a membership card and payroll deduction card before you can receive a ballot. If you do not work where there is payroll deduction for dues (i.e., Non Bargaining Unit), you can become a member by signing a membership card and paying two (2) months back dues. If you have questions about your membership status or want to sign up prior to election day, please contact our Administrative Assistant, Amy, at akosloske@wfnhp.org or 414-475-6065.

In-Person Voting: You can vote in-person at the Fall Membership Meeting on **Saturday, December 9, 2023** **between the hours of 11am to 2pm** at the following locations across the state:

- **WFNHP Union Hall**—9620 W. Greenfield Avenue-1st floor, West Allis, WI 53214
- **Antigo Public Library**—617 Clermont Street, Antigo, WI 54409
- **Cumberland, WI**—Location still being finalized & will be mailed to members in the area at least 15 days prior to the 12/9/23 election date.

Absentee Ballots: There will be no early voting on the day of the election. If you are unable to vote in-person and wish to cast a ballot, you must request an absentee ballot by contacting our Administrative Assistant, Amy, at akosloske@wfnhp.org or 414-475-6065. **Absentee ballot requests must be received by the union office no later than 5pm on November 10, 2023.** Members who request an absentee ballot by this deadline will have their ballot mailed to their home at least 15 days before the election. **All absentee ballots must be mailed back and received to the PO Box by December 8, 2023.** Ballots received after the 12/9/23 election date will not be counted.

Election Results:

Because we are conducting the election at multiple locations, each ballot will be secured in a lockbox and brought back to Milwaukee to be counted by the Election Committee. This will also allow for candidates to have an observer present for the final vote tally. **The Election Committee will count ballots during the week of December 11, 2023.** In case of a tie, a runoff election will be held for that office. Elected Officers & Delegates will be notified of the results of the election via email as soon as administratively possible. Candidates will have 5 days to register any objections in writing. If objections are filed, the Election Committee has 10 days to meet, review, and finalize. If no objections are filed, the election will be considered finalized and elected Officers will take office 1/1/2024. In accordance with the WFNHP constitution and bylaws, the election results will be published or distributed to the membership within thirty (30) days of the count.

Official WFNHP Nomination Form

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY

I nominate the following as Local 5000 Officers:

President: _____

Exec. Vice President: _____

Treasurer: _____

Secretary: _____

(3) At-Large Vice Presidents:

I nominate the following as Local 5000 delegates to the 2024 AFT Convention: (5 to be elected)

I nominate the following as Local 5000 delegates to the 2024 State AFL-CIO Convention: (3 to be elected)

I nominate the following as Local 5000 delegates to the Milwaukee Area Labor Council: (10 to be elected)

Signature _____ Date _____

Personal Email: _____

PLEASE NOTE: There will be no write-in candidates on the final ballot. Only those nominated using this official form will be considered nominated. Form not valid without signature & date.

Forms can be submitted via email to akosloske@wfnhp.org, faxed to 414-475-5722 or mailed to WFNHP, 9620 West Greenfield Avenue, West Allis, WI 53214.

Nominations must be received by 5pm on Friday, November 10, 2023.



Wisconsin Federation
of Nurses & Health
Professionals AFT,
AFL-CIO

A Union of Professionals

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www.wfnhp.org



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**Important Nomination/Election
Information is Enclosed**

**ATTENTION
WFNHP MEMBERS...**

SAVE THE DATE

**Official Notice of WFNHP-
Local 5000 Membership Meeting**

Saturday, December 9, 2023

11am–2pm

(In Antigo, Cumberland & Milwaukee)

- ❖ Annual Reports/Union Business
- ❖ Election of Local 5000 Officers & Delegates
- ❖ Guest Speaker RE: Building Worker Power
- ❖ Solidarity
- ❖ Refreshments
- ❖ Door Prizes

We are excited to announce, that for the first time, WFNHP will be holding our Fall Membership Meeting simultaneously at three locations across the state. We hope this change will allow more members to attend and participate.

At the Fall meeting, we will give our annual reports and conduct other union business, such as holding our election of Local 5000 Officers and Delegates (see page 6-7 for more info on the election), enjoy refreshments and solidarity with members of our union from across the state, and have a chance to win door prizes.

In addition, we will have a special guest speaker, Joe Burns—a longtime labor lawyer and negotiator, and author of *Class Struggle Unionism* and *Reviving the Strike: How Working People Can Regain Power and Transform America*. Joe will be discussing the importance of fighting back against healthcare corporations, and how taking collective actions can help build worker power and strengthen our union.

We are still in the process of planning the meeting, so more details will be coming soon—please watch your emails and our Facebook page! Meanwhile, please save the date and ask your co-workers to attend with you.