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P.O. Box 34660
Reno, NV 89533
Telephone: (775) 747-2333
FAX: (775) 747-1337
www.nvnurses.org

To: Nevada State Legislature, Senate Human Resources and Facilities Committee

From: Lisa Black, BSN, RN; Executive Director, Nevada Nurses Association

Date: May 12, 2003

Regarding: Assembly Bill 313

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Lisa Black. I am a Registered Nurse and the Executive Director of the Nevada Nurses Association. On behalf of the Nevada Nurses Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present to you this afternoon.

For the past several years, we have been talking about the need to address inadequate RN staffing in the hospital setting as a step toward ensuring patient safety. Multiple research studies have demonstrated that the safety and quality of care provided in the nation's health care facilities is directly related to the number and skill mix of direct care nursing staff. More than a decade of research shows that nurse staffing levels and skill mix do make a difference in the outcomes of patients. In short, studies have repeatedly found strong and consistent evidence that increased Registered Nurse staffing is directly related to decreases in the incidence of urinary tract infections, pneumonia, shock, upper gastrointestinal bleeding, and decreased hospital length of stay.

As you will hear, there are many in the health care industry who do not feel it is appropriate to legislatively dictate issues such as Registered Nurse staffing and that further study of and attention to this matter is not necessary. Respectfully, we disagree. Multiple other options have been sought and, regrettably, have consistently failed. Many of the same industries and facility representatives, who will come before you today, also participated with the Nevada State Health Division four years ago to promulgate regulations that require nurse-staffing levels to be based on patient acuity as measured by a direct care Registered Nurse. While a few facilities did use this opportunity to address the Registered Nurse staffing levels in their facilities, most took no action following implementation of these regulations citing that their facilities already used acuity based staffing so no further action was needed. While these regulations were the result of the collective efforts of many people representing a wide range of perspectives, the unfortunate reality is that these regulations have not adequately improved nurse staffing in Nevada's hospitals and have done little, if anything, to improve patient safety. Addressing the current workforce challenges will not to be easy, but to ensure the health of Nevada, it must be done.

This issue is, however, a monumental task that would be difficult, if not impossible, to address during a regular legislative session given the confines of an intense the 120-day schedule. We respectfully ask of you that this issue be commissioned for study by the interim health care committee of this elected body so that it can be adequately and thoughtfully deliberated and sound solutions can be achieved to ensure the future of Nevada's nursing workforce. Truly, nursing in Nevada is in critical condition and we must act thoughtfully, deliberately, and decisively to stem the flow of nurses from the profession and to ensure the safety of all Nevadans in need of nursing care.

The nursing shortage we now face will remain and will likely worsen if adequate steps are not taken to address it from multiple angles. Changes in the workplace must be addressed simultaneously with any effort to recruit nurses into the profession. The profession of nursing will be unable to compete with the myriad of other career opportunities available in today's economy unless we improve working conditions simultaneously with recruiting new nurses. That means that we must address the concerns of Registered Nurses practicing at the bedside. Registered nurses, hospital administrators, other health care providers, health system planners, consumers, and the legislative community must come together in a meaningful way to create a system that supports quality patient care and all health care providers.

The Nevada Nurses Association looks forward to working with you and others to make the current health care environment conducive to high quality nursing care. Improvements in the environment of nursing care, combined with aggressive and innovative recruitment efforts will help avert the potentially catastrophic consequences of this very real nursing crisis. The resulting stable nursing workforce will improve health care for all Nevadans.