

Testimony of CWA District One
Health Committee Budget Hearing
FY2025 NYS Budget
Submitted: January 23, 2024

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the need to ensure sufficient funding to stabilize New York's hospitals and healthcare workforce - and prioritize the needs of the healthcare workforce. My name is Rebecca Miller, and I am the NYS Legislative & Political Director for CWA District One. CWA District One represents approximately 15,000 healthcare workers across New York State and is the largest healthcare union in Western New York.

I am here to talk about two crisis-level issues facing our State, threatening the ability for New Yorkers to receive the care they need and deserve. The first is the underfunding of hospitals and healthcare institutions through inadequate reimbursement of Medicaid costs and the second, is short staffing and the shortage of good healthcare jobs. These issues are linked and each pose an enormous threat to our State.

The urgent short staffing crisis is not a workforce shortage, but a shortage of good healthcare jobs. In New York, along with in the rest of the Country, job growth in healthcare exceeds job growth in all other employment areas. And while Hospitals report having issues filling vacancies for frontline healthcare workers, we know that for the most part it isn't because of a lack of bodies. In fact, the real number of trained and qualified, working age healthcare workers in NYS is actually adequate. However, the US Census shows us that only 52% of those with active licenses are currently working as nurses. Therefore, while there are significant

vacancies, and it is clear there is the need to ensure increased workers entering the field, there are currently a sufficient number of actively licensed and qualified healthcare workers in New York State who are simply not at the bedside. The question is why - and what to do about it.

Short staffing is the number one reported reason why healthcare workers report in record numbers wanting to leave the field within the year, why we're actually seeing healthcare workers leave the field in droves, and why across the Country healthcare worker unions have been going on strike in record numbers, including our own members at Catholic Health in Buffalo. Study after study shows that safe staffing is not only a matter of saving lives, but also a critical matter of recruitment, retention and stabilization of the healthcare workforce. A recent national study shows that 51 percent of surveyed nurses considered leaving the profession within the next year, citing short staffing and moral distress as the driving factors.

The crisis of short staffing is staggering. In November, CWA filed 8,000 violations of the 2021 Clinical Staffing Committee law which represents only a fraction of the horrible state of short staffing that takes place every single day across the State. This is obviously extremely dangerous for patient care and worsens the workforce shortage, but also ends up increasing costs for hospitals. **The FY25 budget must include significant funding to stabilize the healthcare workforce, immediately improve staffing levels, increase recruitment and retention, and ensure better working conditions for NY's healthcare workers.**

Being short staffed in NYS and the crisis of healthcare jobs is a problem both exacerbated by, and in part a result of, the way that hospitals are funded. Hospitals that do not have stable, reliable funding are hampered in their ability to meet the basic purpose they serve - safe, high-quality patient care. The medicaid gap, which threatens hospital budgets, creates a bad

economic incentive for hospitals incentivizing the reduction of their biggest cost - labor. So in addition to funding the immediate stabilization of the workforce, **it is imperative that NYS closes the 30% medicaid gap. The budget must also restore funding for financially distressed and safety net funding as a temporary measure to help stop the hemorrhaging of NYs hospitals.** Without that, we will continue to see additional cuts and closures of needed healthcare facilities, the serious exacerbation of short staffing, and ultimately, leaving New Yorkers without the vital health care that we all need and deserve.

Hospitals are facing significant financial hardship and patients and workers across the State are bearing the devastating consequences. In order to improve conditions for healthcare workers, keep hospitals open, and ensure the best quality of care for all New Yorkers, we need a massive infusion of funds for our hospitals and healthcare workers. Healthcare workers have carried our State on their shoulders and continue to do so - but it is unsustainable. We must act now to improve working conditions and protect the workforce.

It is in all of our interests--the public, the workers, and the hospitals--for the state to invest directly in expanding and stabilizing the hospital workforce across New York.