



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

## NY Senate Republicans Propose Solutions & Call For Action to Help Alleviate Staffing Issues at Healthcare Facilities

GEORGE M. BORRELLO October 15, 2021

| ISSUE: **HEALTHCARE WORKERS, VACCINE MANDATES, LABOR SHORTAGE**



New York Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt, along with members of the Senate Republican Conference, today called for action to help alleviate staffing issues at healthcare facilities and for home care patients in communities throughout New York. Staffing shortages at facilities have been exacerbated by the vaccination mandate placed on healthcare workers that went into effect on September 27, which has led to forced closures and reductions in services and quality of care at already under-staffed facilities.

The Senate Republican Conference proposes to encourage and incentivize the recruitment of new healthcare workers, protect facilities and analyze potential workforce impacts from proposed mandates, and recruit staff in the mental health and direct care industry.

“Healthcare facilities in New York State have been historically understaffed, and those shortages have been magnified by the recent vaccine mandate for healthcare workers. While the goal of increasing vaccinations is laudable, the mandate and lack of an alternative testing option has created an untenable situation with decreased services, longer wait times, and an overall lower quality of care for New Yorkers. My colleagues and I urge Governor Hochul and the Senate and Assembly to come together to help alleviate staffing shortages and improve health outcomes for all New Yorkers,” said Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt.

“Our healthcare workforce have been heroes, showing up each and every day on the frontlines throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposals being put forth by our Republican Conference will help our healthcare workers, their families, and the patients who depend on them for quality care. We cannot wait -- we must immediately address the healthcare staffing crisis to ensure the health and safety of all New Yorkers,” said Senate Deputy Republican Leader Andrew Lanza.

“Those who work in our healthcare industry have been under enormous stress over the past year and a half, but many of the challenges they face pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic. This package of legislation will address several key issues, including staffing, education, patient care and funding. I urge my colleagues in the legislature to support these initiatives to help ensure New York’s healthcare industry is prepared to meet the needs of residents across the state,” said Senator Patrick M. Gallivan, ranking member of the Senate Health Committee.

Included in the proposals unveiled today are bills and action items to:

- Expand eligibility for STEM scholarships for students pursuing a nursing career;
- Create the Healthcare Workforce Innovation Fund to support efforts to improve the healthcare workforce pipeline by supporting high quality training;
- Allow graduates to practice, under supervision, for 180 days until they are able to get licensed;
- Call for interstate professional licensing reciprocity to increase the supply of medical professionals;
- Ensure nursing homes are not penalized for workforce staffing shortages;
- Require an impact analysis on any new legislation or regulation on healthcare facilities;
- Require DOH to disclose data on staffing shortages in healthcare facilities;
- Direct DOH and DOL to collaborate to be aware of and address workforce shortages;????
- Expand the BOCES pilot to allow for earlier entry into a career as a Direct Service Provider (DSP);
- Provide loan forgiveness as an incentive to join the healthcare or DSP workforce; and
- Address the state's inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates; and
- Direct salary increases and a statutory COLA to support the direct care workforce.

Prior to the effective date of the vaccine mandate for healthcare workers, the Senate Republican conference [penned a letter](#) to the Governor, requesting an amendment to allow for a testing alternative in order to prevent additional shortages in the already understaffed healthcare industry.

In addition to the proposals advanced today, Leader Ortt penned a letter to Governor Hochul, calling for immediate action to address the growing crisis in the state healthcare

system.

“Staffing shortages that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic have only been exacerbated in the past two years. To ignore this statewide crisis is simply untenable for patients, healthcare workers, and our entire healthcare system. That’s why I am pleased to be joining my Senate Republican colleagues today in offering clear-eyed solutions that alleviate these issues and improve New Yorkers’ quality of care,” said Senator Phil Boyle, ranking member of the Senate Higher Education Committee.

“The shortages in New York’s health care sector are a problem statewide, but they are especially acute in our rural areas. The state’s vaccine mandates have escalated that problem to a crisis for many facilities. We need practical, effective measures to address the immediate pressures as well as long-term solutions aimed at strengthening our health care workforce and infrastructure. The comprehensive package of legislation we are advancing offers both, with measures that will expedite licensing, encourage recruitment, monitor and target shortages and, importantly, address inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates which are the root cause of many of these problems. New Yorkers deserve better than the compromised health care system we currently have, which is why acting on these initiatives is crucial,” said Senator George Borrello, member of the Senate Aging Committee.

“New York had a shortage of healthcare professionals prior to the coronavirus pandemic. As we continue to confront this public health crisis, it is imperative that we seek innovative ways to support, sustain and grow the state’s healthcare workforce. This package of bills, which includes legislation that I sponsor, will help recruit and retain medical professionals and increase access to healthcare services throughout the state, especially in underserved regions of New York,” said Senator Joe Griffo, member of the Senate Higher Education Committee.

“In my district, some nursing homes have delayed admissions, some hospitals have paused elective surgeries, a local urgent care center has temporarily closed, and patients are being given longer wait times for life-saving screenings. In addition, emergency departments are further backed-up which is causing significant stress on ambulance and EMS providers who are required to remain on site until patients are admitted. There is a domino effect to all of this. When nursing homes can’t admit residents, hospitals are unable to discharge patients who no longer need hospital-level care but do require nursing home or rehabilitative care. Then patients coming through emergency departments need to wait longer for inpatient beds. Then ambulances and EMS workers have fewer resources to respond to emergencies. This situation is having an impact on nearly everyone seeking care. And the challenges are heightened in many of our rural communities where some services are already limited. We are fortunate to have local facilities with dedicated healthcare workers committed to providing quality care to residents under every circumstance. But the last thing the state should be doing is making their jobs harder,” said Senator Pam Helming, ranking member of the Senate Insurance Committee.

“New York’s healthcare worker shortage is bad – and it’s getting even worse. The staffing shortfall is systemic, statewide, means delayed medical care, and puts an even greater strain on our dedicated nurses, doctors, physician assistants, technicians, hospitals, and urgent care centers. Burnout from the non-stop challenges and threat of COVID has hit our healthcare workforce especially hard, and we continue losing the dedicated workers who’ve courageously served on the pandemic’s frontlines. Our healthcare worker shortage is a chronic crisis that we must address. My legislation, Senate Bill S.2553, would create a healthcare worker peer support program modeled after the successful Joseph P. Dwyer Program that offers support to veterans through a confidential, proven, peer-to-peer approach. My bill would build on the Dwyer Program’s success, deliver support and funding to empower healthcare workers to speak with someone who’s shared their experiences and

can help provide counseling during this difficult time. A healthcare worker peer support program is a smart solution to address this serious, growing challenge and provide much-needed support for our healthcare heroes,” said Senator Daphne Jordan, ranking member of the Senate Committee on Women’s Issues.

“With critical workforce shortages increasing among direct support professionals serving our most vulnerable citizens, the innovative ideas contained in this package of bills is badly needed. Some of the shortages in this vitally important sector were caused by wage pressure created by government, so the responsibility for fixing these problems also falls squarely on us. It is long past time for Albany to step up and meet its commitments to our intellectually and developmentally disabled community and their caregivers. I am proud to sponsor legislation that can make a difference. The time is now,” said Senator Mike Martucci, ranking member of the Senate Committee on Disabilities.

“The healthcare vaccine mandate has left many hospitals and senior care facilities shorthanded and it is up to the New York State officials who instituted these mandates to coordinate the effort to alleviate this manmade emergency. This legislation will compel the State to quickly and efficiently address workforce shortages to ensure patient care is not compromised. Ultimately, we would have preferred to keep our healthcare heroes at their jobs, but we must deal with the current reality and do all we can to ensure patient care remains a priority,” said Senator Mario Mattera, member of the Senate Labor Committee.

“The COVID pandemic has intensified and highlighted a growing healthcare workforce shortage. We need to implement innovative solutions that will replenish our frontline workforce and ensure that well-trained professionals are ready to meet increasing demands. Creating a Healthcare Workforce Innovation Fund will unite educational institutions with providers ensuring that our next generation of healthcare professionals is well trained and ready to care for those in need,” said Senator Peter Oberacker, member of the Senate Health

Committee.

“By making permanent the system of interstate licensing reciprocity that served New York State effectively throughout the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can help ensure the steady, long-term availability of a high-quality, highly skilled healthcare workforce for our residents and communities statewide,” said Senator Tom O’Mara, ranking member of the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee.

“Today I join with my colleagues to address a health crisis created by government—one that is impacting every corner of our state and affecting every part of our healthcare industry. While New York has faced workforce shortages in recent years, especially in mental health and senior care, the Governor’s mandate has only compounded these shortfalls, and at the worst possible time. Now, through legislative action, it is our hope to work around this short-sighted policy and expand access and quality of care for all New Yorkers,” said Senator Anthony Palumbo, member of the Senate Committee on Mental Health.

“Staff shortages within our healthcare system have led to increased wait times, fewer services, and an overall lower quality of care for patients. These issues are often further exacerbated by burdensome mandates passed down by Albany. I am proposing an impact analysis be conducted on proposed legislation and regulations so we can understand the true impacts they will have, particularly on the already strained workforce, in our healthcare facilities,” said Senator Ed Rath, ranking member of the Senate Local Government Committee.

“For years now, New York State’s healthcare system has struggled with staffing shortages—and this is especially true in the region I represent. Unfortunately, the vaccine mandate for healthcare workers has made this very serious situation even more dire. We need to take action now to ensure that New Yorkers in every corner of our state have access

to reliable, quality healthcare. I strongly encourage the Governor and other members of the Legislature to consider this package of bills, which will address some of the most pressing issues facing our healthcare industry,” said Senator Patty Ritchie, member of the Senate Committee on Finance.

“Once again, New York is totally unprepared to handle pandemic-related staff shortages that impact our most vulnerable, and in trying to solve one public health challenge, the state is creating another, driving up costs and jeopardizing quality care in the process. Instead of heeding concerns expressed by stakeholders and workers in the field, and learning from past mistakes, the state is choosing to repeat them. It is not right, and ensuring these facilities have the certified staff they need to provide quality care must be our top priority,” said Senator Sue Serino, ranking member of the Senate Aging Committee.

“The dictum in medicine of ‘first, do no harm’ is one that elected officials could do a much better job of practicing. State government too often uses a broad brush rather than acting with precision. When it comes to healthcare, what might work in a metropolitan region doesn’t necessarily fit a rural community. Nursing home staffing has been a huge challenge for years, made worse through COVID. Threatening nursing homes with financial penalties does nothing to address the long-standing problem of recruiting and keeping staff and, in fact, will be counterproductive,” said Senator Dan Stec, ranking member of the Senate Children and Families Committee.

“Even before the pandemic, New York State had a healthcare workforce crisis when it comes to retaining and recruiting our direct care professionals who provide compassionate care to some of our most vulnerable citizens. Unfortunately, Covid has made that situation that much more challenging for our dedicated workers and for the patients and families served. That’s why I’m joining with my Senate Republican colleagues to take a holistic approach to the healthcare workforce crisis, including introducing new legislation to expand statewide



on an innovative BOCES pilot program in the Capital Region to enable high school students the opportunity to learn about the direct care profession through work-based learning opportunities, job mentoring and curriculum-based training,” said Senator Jim Tedisco, ranking member of the Senate Mental Health Committee.

“As the mother of a nurse, I know firsthand the incredible work our nurses do. In order to close the healthcare workforce gap that has existed for years, we must provide incentives for students to enter the field. Expanding the STEM scholarship for nurses would make nursing school more affordable, which will help ensure a greater applicant pool and a robust workforce in the future,” said Senator Alexis Weik, ranking member of the Senate Social Services Committee.

###