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United for Quality Care

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Cathleen Kuzara, RN
Department of Corrections
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations committee. My name is Cathleen Kuzara, I have been a registered nurse for the past twenty five years and a licensed practical nurse for the ten years prior to obtaining my RN degree. I have worked for the Department of Corrections for the past 13 years.

I went into nursing because I have always found fulfillment in providing care to those in need. I have worked in the hospital setting and long term care in various roles. I currently work at Cybulski Corrections which is a level 2 security facility with 700 individuals housed in a dorm setting.

I have seen many changes in the past thirteen years. We have decreased nursing staff numbers. We have hired per diem and agency staffing (Maxim, Cell staff). This has created a divide in the need for permanently filled positions to provide continuity and follow thru with the health issues that are present in the correctional community.

Working in a correctional facility comes with many challenges. Nursing staff have a multitude of duties we must attend to on a daily basis, while also contending with our responsibility to assist with emergency situations. On a daily basis, we are routinely tasked with receiving, logging, and distributing medication for hundreds of patients. Some of whom require medication 2-3 times a day. Nursing staff are responsible for conducting daily, weekly, monthly, and annual testing and evaluations for a wide range of purposes. For instance, we aid in the intake evaluations of new inmates, conduct mental health and medical screenings, hold follow-up appointments for inmates with existing conditions, and more. On average we see five hundred patients a month. Then in addition to all of that, we must be available to aid in emergency situations, which can then interfere with your ability to complete your routine tasks. Keeping up with this work can be challenging, particularly in facilities with dangerously low staffing levels.

I am fortunate to work in a small facility with relatively good staffing, which is primarily due to the number of regular full time employees we have. I have often been told by the patient that they did not expect to be seen so soon as they had just requested to be seen. They mention other facilities where they may have waited a month or longer to be seen. We have few grievances because of this. I see the stress and the lack of the ability for the jails and the larger facilities to meet their patient care needs. They do not have enough fulltime staff.

Working in healthcare can be a demanding and stressful. However, it is also rewarding when at the end of the day you can drive home and feel good about the job you are doing. I am asking

this committee to please protect and increase the funding for health care services in our prisons, so that I may continue to provide that type of quality care I can be proud of.

Thank You