



December 9, 2021

Good morning, Chair Kahle and members of the House Health Policy Committee.

I am Sean Gehle, Vice President of Advocacy for Trinity Health Michigan. As you may know, our health system includes eight hospitals comprised of Mercy Health in West Michigan and Saint Joseph Mercy Health System in Southeast Michigan, as well as two wholly owned Medical groups. We employ over 24,000 associates across Michigan.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for SB 759, legislation that would provide for out-of-state licensees to work in Michigan without a Michigan license during a healthcare professional staffing shortage. Our Chief Nursing Officer would have liked to be here to support this legislation but is currently addressing the crisis conditions we are facing in our hospitals.

I want to first take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the past and current flexibility provided by the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs in their response to the critical healthcare staffing needs in Michigan accelerated by the pandemic. The actions by the Department have been incredibly helpful as we have struggled to meet challenges posed by the large volume of patients needing care in our hospitals.

Out-of-State licensees have made and continue to make significant contributions to patient care during the course of the pandemic and in the current surge we are experiencing. As a national healthcare system, the current flexibility has been particularly helpful since approximately 25% of our own labor pool that provides support to our hospitals in Michigan possess Out-of-State licenses. A significant advantage of drawing from this pool is that these professionals are familiar with our organizational culture, mission, and values and can flow from one Trinity Health Michigan facility to another as needed. Currently we have approximately 54 out-of-state licensees providing care across our Trinity Health Michigan footprint; the vast majority of them nurses.

We were experiencing, along with the healthcare industry as a whole, significant workforce challenges before the pandemic, however these challenges have been significantly exacerbated over the last 20 months. Our front-line caregivers are worn-out and burned out as our state endures yet another surge of COVID positive cases and ensuing hospitalizations. Our hospitals are filled to capacity with COVID and NON-COVID cases. I would like to share a couple of statistics to give you a feel for our current workforce situation:



- Currently we have approximately 331 HCW's Quarantined (confirmed positive or suspected). We have had 4,927 HCW's cumulatively confirmed positive and quarantined during the course of the pandemic.
- The number of vacant positions across our statewide footprint has increased by 48% (60% for RN vacancies) since March of 2020. We are currently attempting to fill over 3,000 vacant positions.
- Our overall turnover rate has increased by 22% since 2019 and our overall RN turnover rate has increased by 45% since 2019.
- TH-Michigan's vaccine requirement resulted in only 172 employees leaving our organization (51 terminations and 121 voluntary separations; less than 1% of our workforce)
- Given these challenges we rely on the flexibility to utilize nurses and other licensed health professionals (ie. Respiratory Therapists) with out-of-state licenses as one tool among many others to attempt to address the current workforce shortage, thereby permitting us to avoid closing beds and discontinuing services that our community desperately needs.
- We know that when such services were discontinued during the first wave of the pandemic, up to 62% more patients were pronounced deceased in their homes when compared to the pre-pandemic period, many with chronic illnesses that exacerbated in the wake of fear and lack of public confidence in our ability to serve safely.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for SB 759. I am happy to answer any questions from Committee members.