



## Ascension

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 25, 2021

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of Ascension, I write today to thank you for holding a hearing on supporting the health care workforce. In particular, we write to offer strong support for the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant strain on our workforce, especially our nursing workforce, and in turn our facilities. We are grateful that the Committee is considering legislation to support health care workers at this critical time.

Ascension is a faith-based healthcare organization dedicated to transformation through innovation across the continuum of care. As one of the leading non-profit and Catholic health systems in the U.S., Ascension is committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. In FY2021, Ascension provided \$2.3 billion in care of persons living in poverty and other community benefit programs. Ascension includes more than 150,000 associates and 40,000 aligned providers. Ascension operates more than 2,600 sites of care – including 142 hospitals and more than 40 senior living facilities – in 19 states and the District of Columbia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated nursing workforce shortages and other challenges that have weighed on the healthcare delivery system for some time. Today, after being on the front lines of the global pandemic for many long months, many health care workers are exhausted. As a result, many health systems are experiencing a growing nursing workforce crisis. This severe and growing shortage of nurses, and those who have experienced the realities of treating high numbers of COVID-19 cases, will have long-term repercussions for the profession and the healthcare delivery system, overall.

We hope that one message Congress takes away from this hearing is the imperative to provide support to meet the physical, mental, and behavioral health needs of today's workforce. Nursing

is calling to care for the sick and tend to the dying, this profession has always taken a mental and physical toll. But the burdens wrought by the pandemic have become too great for many to bear. That is why we strongly support the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act. This bill would establish grants to improve mental and behavioral health and prevent burnout among health care providers, direct HHS to study and develop policy recommendations on preventing burnout and improving mental and behavioral health among health care providers, and task CDC with conducting a campaign to encourage health care providers to seek support and treatment for mental and behavioral health concerns. This legislation provides much-deserved support to frontline caregivers, and we commend the Committee for moving it forward.

This hearing is an important step in mitigating this growing crisis. In addition to supporting health care workers' mental health, we urge Congress and the Committee to examine ways to enable the growth of a nursing workforce capable of meeting current and future delivery system needs and to work with HHS to more accurately recognize and reimburse for nursing services provided to patients. The COVID-19 pandemic response has made clear that APRNs and RNs are indispensable to providing the care that patients need now and in the future. We look forward to working with the Committee to address these important issues.

Thank you again for holding a hearing on how best to support our health care workforce. If you have any questions, or if there is any additional support we can provide, please do not hesitate to contact Mark Hayes, Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy for Ascension at [mark.hayes@ascension.org](mailto:mark.hayes@ascension.org).

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter M. Leibold". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Peter M. Leibold  
Executive Vice President  
Chief Advocacy Officer