



The National Voice for Direct-Care RNs

WASHINGTON DC
8630 Fenton Street
Suite 1100
Silver Spring MD 20910
phone: 800-287-5021
fax: 240-235-2019

OAKLAND
155 Grand Avenue
Oakland CA 94612
phone: 800-504-7859
fax: 510-663-1625

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U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of National Nurses United (NNU), we urge you to oppose H.R. 1461, legislation that, if enacted, would limit the use of “official time” by employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, thereby severely hindering patient care provided by RNs employed at V.A. medical facilities. We also oppose the Banks’ amendment in the nature of a substitute, and urge you to vote against both the bill and this amendment.

NNU represents over 150,000 registered nurses across the country, including 11,000 RNs employed at 23 Veterans Administration medical facilities. The duty of registered nurses within the VA healthcare system is to provide high quality care and to advocate for the men and women who put their lives and health at risk defending our nation. Our members are the front-line caregivers whose work ensures that patients get the care they need. H.R. 1461 would severely impair VA nurses’ ability to advocate on behalf of our patients, thereby putting our veteran patients at risk.

H.R. 1461 would limit registered nurses who work as union representatives, to use no more than 25% of their working time for official time. The Banks amendment would completely prohibit registered nurses from using official time. The use of official time is critical to the functioning of the health facilities managed by the Veterans Administration. The staff nurses that use official time on behalf of the RNs who care for our nation’s veterans are necessary to ensure that they can advocate for their patients and enable the smooth running of the V.A. hospitals. Union representatives do not use official time for union business, which is already prohibited by existing law.

The protection of the rights of RNs in the V.A. has a direct impact on their ability to provide quality patient care. The federal RNs who use official time do so to represent the concerns of their co-workers who are legally responsible for patient care. This use of official time includes advocating for safe patient care, patient and nurse injury prevention, ensuring that registered

nurses have a voice in decisions that affect working conditions and patient care, protecting against discrimination, protecting whistleblowers who help improve care, and representing employees in grievances and disciplinary actions. Our nation's veterans will lose out if the V.A. facilities are further undermined in being able to recruit talented and experienced RNs, something that is already a problem and that will be exacerbated by a law that undermines their ability to have a collective voice on the job.

The official time framework is necessary to ensure that all workers have access to the representation they deserve. Further, H.R. 1461, and the Banks amendment, would allow V.A. employees to terminate the collection of their union dues at any time – a clear attack on the unions that represent V.A. employees and work for quality patient care.

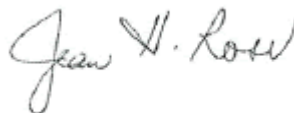
National Nurses United is dedicated to ensuring quality patient care for all Americans – indeed, this is the top priority for registered nurses nationwide – and that must include the care our veterans receive in V.A. hospitals and clinics. Respecting the rights and responsibilities of bedside nurses, the primary caregivers of those patients, is a crucial component of ensuring that quality care. All workers should have their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining respected in their workplace.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 1461, the Banks amendment, and any subsequent legislation that would attack patient care in V.A. hospitals.

Sincerely,



Deborah Burger, RN
President, NNU



Jean Ross, RN
President, NNU