



UNAC/UHCP

United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals

UNAC/UHCP is affiliated with NUHHCE, AFSCME and the AFL-CIO



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March 15, 2022

The Honorable Mark Takano, Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Takano:

On behalf of the 32,000 members of the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP), which is part of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees (NUHHCE) and is affiliated with the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I request this letter be included in the record for the March 17 hearing on "Building a Better VA: Addressing Healthcare Workforce Recruitment and Retention Challenges."

UNAC/UHCP is proud of our nurses who care for veterans and military personnel at the Jerry L. Pettis Memorial VA Medical Center in Loma Linda, CA and the Naval Medical Center in Balboa Park, CA. All of these nurses have been on the front lines of fighting COVID and subject to the elevated risk to their own physical and mental health.

Our report, [The True Cost of Being A Hero](#) (2021), documents the mental health strains in nursing and health care. An overwhelming majority of Registered Nurses (RNs) and other crucial health care professionals are stressed out, burned out, anxious, exhausted, depressed, traumatized, and unable to get a good night's sleep. Despite years of investments in education and certification, these workers have found themselves forced to think about leaving the professions they love for their self-preservation. The looming exodus of nurses has accelerated the pre-pandemic nurse shortage: 36 percent of nurses have considered or are considering leaving the bedside. While increasing the numbers of RNs in the pipeline is important, it is not enough if we leave the status quo intact.

This committee can take a crucial step to address this dire crisis in nursing by ensuring that the RNs who care for veterans in VA hospitals have a voice at the workplace. Current federal law, 38 U.S.C § 7422, unfairly silences these workers and thwarts their efforts to collectively bargain over concerns about understaffing, scheduling and other working conditions. Enactment of your bill, the VA Employee Fairness Act of 2021 (H.R.1948), would begin to remedy this injustice.

Thank you for standing with VA nurses and their right to have a voice at their workplace to speak up for their profession and patients.

Sincerely,

Denise Duncan, RN

President, UNAC/UHCP