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March 16, 2021

Chair Weisz and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the North Dakota Nurses Association in support of SB 2145, a bill that would assign designated caregivers to long term care residents.

For many months, long term care residents and their families dealt with the stress and strain of isolation due to efforts to keep them safe from COVID-19. Senate Bill 2145 would allow designated caregivers. It states, "a designated caregiver is an individual, whether a family member or friend of a resident of a long-term care facility, who is designated by the resident or appointed by an individual with decision-making authority for the resident to provide in-person physical, spiritual, or emotional support to the resident during a declaration of disaster or emergency".

The North Dakota Nurses Association supports SB 2145. The designated caregivers could open a well-needed support line. The caregivers would be subject to standardized safety protocols, and individual facilities would have leeway to ask for some additional precautions.

In the facilities where residents have been unable to see family, nursing staff have been the sole caregivers, providing the physical and emotional support for their patients. This could impact nurses with either burnout or compassion fatigue. With these, "commonly reported symptoms include fatigue, illness, headaches, insomnia, disillusionment, emotional instability, anger, sense of hopelessness, and excessive rigidity in interpersonal relations (Epp, 2012; Jenkins & Warren, 2012). "Compassion fatigue has a different source of stress. The stress comes from the nurse's involvement in relationships with patients and families in which the nurse witnesses the trauma or suffering of patients. The cumulative effect causes physical, mental, and spiritual symptoms in the nurse" (Wentzel & Brysiewicz, 2014).

As the mission of NDNA is to advance the nursing profession by promoting professional development of nurses, fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the safety and well-being of nurses in the workplace, and by advocating on health care issues affecting nurses and the public, we feel SB 2145 would not only improve the quality of life for our wonderful residents, but also our valuable resource of nurses.

Sincerely,

Sherri Miller, BS, BSN, RN

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Executive Director

North Dakota Nurses Association