

12 October 2022

Jack Sargeant MS,
Chair of the Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Dear Jack

I am writing to you in response to the plenary debate on petition P-06-1276, 'Extend Section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016'.

As the Chair of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Wales, and as the petitioner, I would first like to thank the Petition Committee for recommending our petition for debate. It is of great value to the Senedd that topics such as nurse staffing levels can be debated in plenary due to the democratic processes of the Senedd.

I'd specifically like to thank members of the Committee that spoke in favour of the petition during the debate, including Joel James MS and Buffy Williams MS.

I was pleased to hear from Joel James MS that the Welsh Conservative's wholeheartedly support the petition as in his words it is clear the 'situation nurses find themselves in is both unacceptable, and in the long term, completely unsustainable for the profession'.

Royal College of Nursing

Ty Maeth
King George V Drive East
Cardiff
CF14 4XZ

Richard Jones MBE

RCN Wales Board Chair, RCN
Council Member

Telephone 02920 680703

Email Richard.Jones@rcn.org.uk

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Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol y Deyrnas
Gyfunol/Royal College of Nursing
of the United Kingdom
20 Cavendish Square
Lundain/London W1G 0RN
Ffôn/Telephone
+44 (0) 20 7409 3333
RCN Direct 0345 772 6100
rcn.org.uk

Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol Cymru
Swyddfa Gogledd Cymru/
Royal College of Nursing Wales
Ty Maeth, Rhodfa Ddwyreiniol/
Brenin George V/
King George V Drive East
Caerdydd/Cardiff
CF14 4XZ

Llywydd/President
Dr Denise Chaffer
Ysgrifennydd Cyffredinol a
Phrif Weithredwr/
General Secretary &
Chief Executive
Pat Cullen

Cyfarwyddwr, RCN Cymru/
Director, RCN Wales
Helen Whyley

Mae'r RCN yn cynrychioli nrysys a nyrsio, gan hyrwyddo rhagoriaeth mewn arfer a llunio polisiau iechyd
The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies

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Mae'r Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol yn Goleg Brenhinol a sefydlwyd drwy Siarter Frenhinol ac Undeb Llafur Cofestr Arbennig a sefydlwyd a dan Ddeddf Undebau Llafur (Cydgrynhoi) 1992.

The RCN is a Royal College set up by Royal Charter and a Special Register Trade Union established under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

I wholeheartedly agree with Buffy Williams MS when she voiced that nurses are the 'heart and soul of our national health services'. Buffy's statement summarising the debate, perfectly outlines the strength of feeling for the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016, detailing that 'whatever party we belong to and whatever community we represent, we all want to ensure that we have the appropriate number of nurses to ensure the safety and wellbeing of patient'.

Rhun Ap Iorwerth MS also outlined Plaid Cymru's support for the petition and explaining that 'yes, requiring the Act to reach all parts of the NHS back in 2016 was asking a lot in practical terms. Well, given that we are in 2022, it's time to extend it further'.

I'd also like to thank Jenny Rathbone MS for asking vital questions regarding nurse staffing levels in community and mental health settings and the use of agency nursing. Questions such as these are important to understanding the wider debate surrounding nursing as a profession in Wales.

However, I was disappointed by the response from the Welsh Government.

Eluned Morgan MS, Minister for Health and Social Services, detailed that the Act is grounded in evidence, which I completely agree with. However, the Minister expressed that the evidence-based tools for the extension of Section 25B 'do not currently exist'. The Minister failed to recognise the tremendous work of the All Wales Nurse Staffing Programme and did not say whether this work would continue.

The All Wales Nurse Staffing Programme has been gathering the evidence needed to extend Section 25B for a number of years. Principles for district nursing were published in 2017 and have received several audits to test their validity. Principles have also been developed for health visiting and mental health inpatient wards. Unfortunately, and with deep concern to RCN Wales, the Chief Nursing Officer has expressed that she does not plan on publishing these principles. This will effectively pause the gathering of evidence and extension of Section 25B. This was not reflected in the Ministers response to the petition, nor addressed when directly asked by Rhun Ap Iorwerth MS.

Despite the response by the Welsh Government, I believe the petition has been a great successful for members of the public that support safe nurse staffing levels. The debate has shown the strength of feeling among the public, the nursing profession, and politicians for the extension of Section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016.

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RCN Wales will continue to call for safe nurse staffing levels through the extension of Section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Level (Wales) Act 2016 to community nursing and mental health inpatient wards as I know this is a top priority for the nursing profession and patients in Wales.

I'd like to thank you for your support.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R' and 'J'.

Richard Jones
Chair
RCN Wales Board