

Amanda Klinge, Registered Nurse Orthopedic Trauma Unit at UW Health

My name is Amanda Klinge, and I'm a registered nurse at UW Health in the orthopedic trauma unit. I have 5 years of service there, and have worked in health care for 15 years. Thank you, Chairman Miles and members of the Executive Committee, for sharing your time with me tonight as I've come to speak in support of the Healthcare Workforce Trauma Recovery and Training Program.

I love being a nurse, but chronic understaffing in my workplace, along with the effects of the pandemic, have taken a major toll on me both physically and mentally.

Right now, I'm on FMLA leave from work, and I trace it directly to long-term effects of working in a profession that has been pushed to the brink.

This spring, I had to take leave after suffering chronic burnout from working in a chronically understaffed, post-COVID environment. One of the steps I took was to increase the dosage of my antidepressants. My new regiment was working, and I returned to work. Unfortunately, this increase led to skyrocketing blood pressure, crippling migraines, and neurological symptoms. I had to immediately come off my medication until my doctor gets my blood pressure under control. Now I'll have to start from scratch, and the work conditions for me and others in healthcare are still troubling.

We are seeing sicker patients, who are dealing with more acute illness. We have to take on more patients when jobs are unfilled or colleagues are out. We routinely deal with disrespect and anger from patients. All this takes a toll on our mental health.

Healthcare employers are not addressing these issues in a meaningful way, and that's why we need support from our community and you all right now.

I want to thank you for your work as county supervisors. Thank you to the Health and Human Needs Committee for creating its subcommittee and for all of their work.

I know you face tough choices with this budget. But I just wanted to point out that UW Health has the only Level I trauma unit in the area. While everything in the budget is important and everyone is doing good things, we are it. There is no one else. We struggle to staff our hospital, and we are not the only ones. Just this week, we were short 34 nurses. That's about 136 patients who should have their own nurses but instead have to share with others because there aren't enough nurses to go around. And even more patients aren't getting enough attention because their nurses are now covering for the missing workers.

Patients deserve better, and so do the workers who care for them. The Healthcare Workforce Trauma Recovery and Training Program will help retain employees and attract new ones. Please support the 2023 budget proposal. Please create the Healthcare Workforce Trauma Recovery and Training Program, and please consider increasing funding to this critical program.