TENNESSEE NURSES

To Every Nurse in Tennessee

From one Tennessean to the people who hold this state together

You already do the work. You are the one at the bedside at 3 a.m. You are the one who notices the change in a patient before the monitor does. You are the one who stays past the end of a shift because there is no one to hand off to. Nobody has to explain your job to you.

So this is not a letter about what nursing is. It is a letter about who gets to decide how it is done — and about the one tool that puts that decision partly in your hands.

In November 2026, nurses in Chattanooga showed every nurse in this state that it can be done here. Not in California. Here.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE IN TENNESSEE RIGHT NOW

1. No law limits how many patients you are given

Tennessee has no state law setting maximum nurse-to-patient ratios in hospitals. Only California, since 2004, and Oregon, since 2023, have comprehensive statewide ratio laws. Massachusetts and New York set limits for intensive care only. In Tennessee, your assignment is decided by your employer.

2. Without a contract, you work at will

Tennessee is an at-will employment state. Absent a contract, your schedule, your unit, and your assignment can be changed, and you can be disciplined, without anyone owing you a reason. A union contract replaces that with written rules and a grievance procedure you can actually enforce.

3. Joining is your choice, and it stays your choice

Tennessee is a right-to-work state, and since the November 2022 referendum that protection sits in the state constitution. No one can require you to join a union or pay dues as a condition of keeping your job. Anyone who tells you otherwise is guessing.

4. The law already protects you for organizing

Under Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act, it is illegal for an employer to fire you, threaten you, or retaliate against you for talking with your coworkers about forming a union. Talking to each other is protected activity.

5. Staffing ratios were won, not granted

National Nurses United says plainly that California's staffing ratios came from nurses organizing — won at the bargaining table and in the legislature. No state has ever handed nurses a safe assignment because it was the right thing to do.

> **“Nurses will now have a seat at the table when decisions are being made that directly affect our patients.”**
> — ALEX LONG, RN — COMMONSPIRIT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, CHATTANOOGA

A union is not a stranger who shows up to speak for you. It is you and the nurses beside you, with a contract behind what you say. It is the difference between raising a staffing concern and being thanked for it, and raising a staffing concern that the hospital is legally bound to answer.

You do not need permission to start. You need a conversation with the nurse next to you.

If you are ready, National Nurses United will help you organize your facility. If you are not sure yet, talk to the nurses in Chattanooga. They were not sure either.

In solidarity,

Kevin Bradshaw
Founder & Creator · LaborEducation.org

This is general information about workers' rights, not legal advice. For advice about your specific situation, speak with a union representative or an employment attorney.

READY TO ORGANIZE YOUR FLOOR?

National Nurses United · nationalnursesunited.org/organize

The full message, and the Chattanooga results: https://laboreducation.org/tennessee-nurses