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August 1, 2022

The Honorable Kevin Cramer
United States Senate
330 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Greg Murphy
United States House of Representatives
313 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Cramer and Representative Murphy:

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), a membership organization of more than 4,000 hospice locations representing nearly 60,000 hospice professionals and hundreds of thousands of volunteers dedicated to caring for patients and families across the country, and the Hospice Action Network (HAN), its advocacy affiliate, I am writing to share our endorsement of the *Travel Nursing Agency Transparency Study Act* (S. 4352).

For years, hospices and palliative care facilities have experienced nursing shortages. This issue predated COVID-19 but has only been exacerbated since the pandemic began. During one of the nation's worst public health crises, hospices have struggled to keep their doors open and serve patients largely due to a shortage of nursing staff. Specifically, hospices simply cannot compete with superfluous, unsustainably high contract rates from travel nursing agencies.

We share concerns voiced by yourself and many others that travel nursing agencies may be exploiting the pandemic and acting in anti-competitive ways. Agencies appear to have capitalized on the desperate need for nurses by charging exorbitant rates to bring in profits for themselves without much of the actual earnings passed on to nurses. In January 2021, wages for travel nurses were up to 3.4 times higher than regular full-time nurses. Several staffing agencies have reported gross profit increases of more than 90% between 2020 and 2022. The industry's revenue also tripled to about \$11.8 billion in 2021, up from \$3.9 billion in 2015, according to Staffing Industry Analysts. Anecdotally, hospices have reported instances where nurses left to join a travel nursing agency, only to be placed back at the same hospice with a significantly higher wage.

We are pleased to support your bill which will take steps to better understand this issue. Specifically, this bill would require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study and report on the effects of travel nurse agencies on the health care industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study includes information on practices such as any potential price gouging and taking of excessive profits, the difference between how much such agencies charged health care institutions and how much they paid their contracted nurses, and the extent to which travel nurse agency practices contribute to workforce shortages.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting nurses. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support our nation's hospice and palliative care providers and ensure access to quality end-of-life care.

Sincerely,

Ben Marcantonio
Interim President and CEO