

## **Jonathan Butler: 'No' on Q1 - not a fit for Berkshires – October 27, 2018**

**By Jonathan Butler**

PITTSFIELD — Throughout the past six months, 1Berkshire has paid close attention to the Question 1 nurse staffing ballot initiative. Like all voters, we have heard many different perspectives, which have since come to fuel a heated and thoughtful dialogue in advance of the Nov. 6 election.

One thing that can certainly be acknowledged is that proponents from both sides aspire to improve the overall quality of our healthcare system while also assuring better patient safety. This aspiration is critical to us, as the mission of our organization is to support efforts that can genuinely improve the quality of life for those of us who live, work and visit the Berkshires. After much reflection and discussion, our organization agrees with many other key stakeholders that there is no conclusive evidence that a nurse staffing law will lead to improved care.

On the state level, there are several potential impacts of this proposed law that grab our attention. For starters, Massachusetts has some of the best hospitals in the world, including those within our own Berkshire Health System. Question 1 threatens this status, as its passage would override the judgement of doctors and nurses in favor of a one-size-fits-all government mandate.

Further, passage would establish a precedent for applying the blunt use of statewide referenda to industry-specific decisions that should be made through deliberation among knowledgeable stakeholders — in this instance nurses, administrators, patient advocates and community leaders. Once we see this in healthcare, which industry could be next?

### **COSTS PASSED DOWN**

In terms of a more local impact, we all know that both working families and businesses are struggling with the ever-escalating costs of healthcare. The Massachusetts Health Policy Commission, an independent state agency, estimates that healthcare costs will increase between \$676 million and \$949 million annually if this initiative passes. Those increases will be borne by the consumers, placing further financial strain on local families and our small business-driven economy.

Beyond the numbers, both the Commonwealth and the Berkshires are already in the midst of a nursing shortage. The Massachusetts Health Policy Commission estimates that hospitals would need to hire between 2,286 and 3,101 additional registered nurses statewide if Question 1 is passed. BHS alone has indicated it will need to hire an additional 126 nurses to meet the staffing standards mandated by Question 1. Our current system is not producing nursing candidates at anywhere near the rate needed to keep up with this mandate. Passage of Question 1 will force hospitals to seek costly alternatives in order to comply with the law, which will only further increase their costs while likely placing tremendous strain on the existing workforce.

As the largest business and economic development organization in the region, 1Berkshire has an obligation to advocate on behalf of the healthiest environment possible for our businesses, their workforces and the people of the Berkshires. Supporting the organizations that maintain the quality of our healthcare system is an inherent part of that advocacy, and we oppose Question 1 because we believe it to be the wrong method at the wrong time for Berkshire County.

*Jonathan Butler is the president and CEO of 1Berkshire.*