

SAFE STAFFING DOESN'T TAKE A BREAK

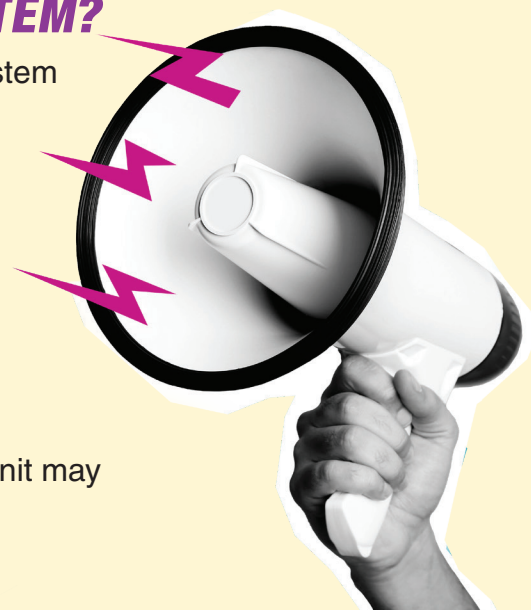
DOCUMENT MISSED BREAKS. DOCUMENT STAFFING VARIANCES. EVERY TIME.

IS YOUR UNIT USING THE BREAK BUDDY SYSTEM?

Many patient care units have historically used a "break buddy" system to cover meal and rest breaks. However, this practice may not comply with Washington's hospital staffing requirements.

Labor & Industries (L&I) and the Department of Health (DOH) have stated that the staffing plan establishes the minimum number of staff required on the unit. Those minimum staffing levels must be maintained at all times—including when an employee is on a meal or rest break.

If your unit relies on staff already assigned to the unit to absorb another caregiver's patients while that caregiver is on break, the unit may fall below its staffing plan during the break period.



"When staffing falls below the approved staffing plan for any reason, including meal and rest break coverage, a staffing variance or short staffing form should be completed to document the occurrence." **-Carol Lightle RN, Swedish Issaquah**

WHAT YOU CAN DO

DOCUMENT EVERY VARIANCE

- If a coworker goes on break and staffing drops below the staffing plan, complete a staffing variance form.
- If your meal or rest break is missed, interrupted, or not provided on time, document the break violation in your timekeeping system.
- Report it to L&I: <https://1199nw.org/436Gwzj>
- Encourage your coworkers to do the same.





"If it isn't documented, it didn't happen. Accurate reporting creates the record needed to identify staffing problems, enforce compliance, and improve break coverage for everyone." -**Cara Alderson RN, Swedish Cherry Hill**



"Don't normalize working short so that someone else can take a break. Document the short staffing every time." -**Pamela Peterson CNA, Kadlec**

JUST BECAUSE YOU ATE DOESN'T MEAN YOU GOT A BREAK

- ✓ Late Break? Document It.
- ✓ Missed Break? Document It.
- ✓ Working Short During Break Coverage? Document It.
- ✓ Every Variance. Every Time.

Under Washington law, meal and rest breaks in hospital settings must meet specific requirements. Simply grabbing food while working, eating at the nurses' station, or taking a break outside the required timeframe may not qualify as a compliant break.

Under Washington law, meal and rest breaks must be provided on time and without interruption except in very limited circumstances. If your break was missed, interrupted, or provided outside the required timeframe, document it as a missed break. Accurate reporting helps ensure compliance and safe staffing.



WHY DOCUMENT?

Hospitals must report missed meal and rest breaks to the state and are expected to achieve at least 80% compliance with break requirements.



"Your documentation helps ensure the hospital's compliance reports reflect reality—not wishful thinking." -**Jessica Wolfe, RN Kaiser Permanente**