

Local candidate joins calls for quicker recognition of foreign nursing credentials

By day, Iranian-Canadian Marjan Kasirlou is a home dialysis coordinator for Humber River Hospital. This fall, she will hit the ground running as a Provincial candidate in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill for the Ontario Liberal Party.

Now, and in between, the internationally-educated nurse is pressing the Ontario Government to speed up the process of recognizing foreign nursing credentials to help ease the system that is under extreme pressure due to the ongoing global pandemic.

Ms. Kasirlou, who was confirmed as the candidate for Aurora's south riding this past fall, joined Ontario Liberal Leader Steven Del Duca and fellow nurses who are part of the party's slate of candidates to call on Premier Doug Ford to do just that in the days leading up to Christmas.

"As an internationally-educated nurse, I have been through the lengthy process of getting credentialled in Ontario," she told reporters at a news conference last month. "So many haven't been registered and haven't been able to get credentialled yet. The time is now to roll out that measure. We have so many nurses in Ontario who come with a lot of amazing backgrounds, experiences and knowledge. We have registered nurses with PhD degrees, Masters degrees, and will have to wait a couple of years". I am seeing a lot of nurses in Ontario right now working in different capacities [and] it is not unique to nursing, it is through other professions in the healthcare system. We have some physicians who are working in different sectors and they don't want to go through a lengthy process."

Throughout the fight against COVID-19, doctors and nurses have proved themselves "the true heroes" of the pandemic. Now, Mr. Del Duca agrees, is time for Ontario to show its support for the profession.

"If we don't have the women and men, the registered nurses on the frontlines, feeling supported, feeling like they have everything they need to succeed, we will not have the healthcare system Ontarians deserve," he said. "Like Marjan at one point in time, they are there, they exist in Ontario, they want to help, they want to practice their profession, they want to do the job they were trained to do, and we need their help.

"The fact we continue to throw out obstacles and impediments to stop them from participating in our collective progress makes no sense to me."

Having this talent "on the sidelines" is a result of the process being "too cumbersome, too complex, and too slow to make sure their credentials are recognized here," he continued.

"Why this hasn't been a priority for the past 20 months, I haven't a clue. If we have thousands of nurses "registered nurses and others "leaving the system and not wanting to join the profession, what does that say for people in Doug Ford's riding and the ridings of the rest of his members? Maybe they think this is partisan politics, but it's not."

Streamlining the foreign credentials recognition program is not the only issue related to nursing proposed by the Liberal leader. The conference was also an opportunity to press the government to repeal Bill 124, which caps compensation increases for Registered Nurses and others on the frontlines at 1 per cent.

"When you were losing registered nurses in record numbers because they are exhausted, because they are burnt out, because they are going elsewhere to practice their profession, you need to actually have a proper and respectful relationship," he said. "Bill 124 is an absolute non-starter if we want to have the healthcare system that Ontarians deserve."

By Brock Weir Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter