

The UC Health system is here today to express our support for HB 421, which will grant immunity to local governments, police chiefs and sheriffs who enter into agreement to allow hospital police departments located within their jurisdiction to exercise police powers under Ohio Revised Code 4973.17. We believe the authority to act as hospital police officers is important and necessary to ensure a safe environment for our patients, visitors, employees and staff.

Public Safety - Background

The UC Health Public Safety Department is a commissioned hospital police agency under Ohio Revised Code 4973.17. The department was first commissioned in November 1992. Today the department provides services at UC Medical Center, the UC Health Business Center, Drake Center and West Chester Hospital along with a number of smaller facilities across our region.

The department is staffed with both commissioned police officers and security officers. The police officers are commissioned by the Governor of Ohio through the office of the Secretary of State. All police officers are required to have the same basic police academy training as other police officers in Ohio. The Ohio Peace Officers Training Council (OPOTA) requires the completion of a minimum 450 hours training course at a police academy certified by OPOTA as an approved training facility.

Currently we have about 150 officers across our system. When we are fully staffed, about 70 of these will be police officer positions.

The Ohio Revised Code requires that hospital police agencies must have an agreements with the jurisdiction having authority for officers to function as police officers, having powers of arrest. Mutual aid agreements exist between UC Health and West Chester Township and the City of Mason, Ohio. Until recently we had such an agreement with the City of Cincinnati.

The City of Cincinnati has chosen to withdraw from the agreement citing concerns over possible liability should the municipality agree to allow our officers to exercise police powers.

Hospital – Background

UC Health serves the Greater Cincinnati community through four hospitals, UC Medical Center, the regions only Level 1 trauma center, West Chester Hospital, the Daniel Drake Center and the Linder Center Of Hope. We employ over 10,000 associates. Everyday thousands of people enter our facilities, and unfortunately, hospitals are not immune to the same challenges face by our cities of providing a safe environment.

During 2019 our department responded to 63,700 radio runs across the system, and of that number 40,700 were at UC Medical Center. On an average our hospital treats 30 – 60 gunshot victims, and between 20 – 30 stabbing victims each month among the other violent trauma victims. We make numerous arrests each week for various incidents of criminal activity.

Actually on December 20th, 2017, one of our security officers was shot by a person who attempted to enter our psychiatric services with two hand guns.

Because we recognize our need to have authorized police officers on site, we have contracted for off-duty Cincinnati Police Officers to provide the authority to effect arrests and exercise police authority. Our hospital system budgeted 1.6 million dollars in 2019 for this service.

Recognizing the need to have our own police agency UC Health is in the process of increasing our staffing of police officers. Recruiting is difficult for all police agencies across the country today. We have now developed our own State of Ohio certified police academy and our first class has 12 our security officers will graduate in July with the same certificate as any other police officer in Ohio.

The Problem

The need to provide police service to our hospitals is not in question. UC Health is only one among many hospitals and hospital systems across Ohio who have established in-house police agencies. Our challenge is getting these agreements with the local government to act as police officers. In our case we have facilities in multiple locations and our officers have this authority in two of the three different jurisdictions.

I understand the reluctance for other police chiefs and sheriffs to establish these agreements if they feel they are accepting additional liability for officers whom they do not control. The intent of these agreements is to make sure the local authorities and the hospital police agencies have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities each will have in providing police service. The passage of this bill is another step in clarifying these relationships.

Many hospitals in Ohio are faced with the same challenge as UC Health, multiple facilities in multiple jurisdictions requiring multiple agreements. HB 421 clearly amends 4973.17 ORC to remove any liability to the local governments and their officials for entering into these agreements.

The passage of this bill will aid local governments across Ohio to support the efforts of the hospitals and hospital systems to provide a safe and secure environment if they choose to employ hospital police officers. This bill will provide the basis for public and private police agencies to form stronger and mutually beneficial relationships in providing complex policing services in our communities.

UC Health respectfully requests your favorable consideration and support of this legislation.