



HB 452 – Healthcare Workplace Safety Act
Sponsor Testimony
Representative Andrea White & Representative Rachel Baker

Chair Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for allowing us to come and testify on House Bill 452, legislation designed with health care professionals to help provide a framework for violence prevention and workplace safety plans, training and reporting standards across the state. Our goal: to better support our frontline health care workers who are so often serving our most wounded, traumatized and physically and mentally struggling citizens.

Throughout our communities, so many of our businesses continue to face an urgent workforce crisis—particularly in some of our most vital industry sectors including health care. As we begin to peel back the reasons driving these staffing shortages, one glaring fact demands our immediate attention—a steady increase in workplace violence.

Imagine, at 26 weeks pregnant, being slammed into a wall by a patient you’re trying to help in an emergency, or having to endure two surgeries and extensive therapy following a hand injury sustained by a violent patient that limits your ability to fully practice in the role you are most passionate about, or experiencing a vicious, unprovoked attack while serving in hospital security that results in permanent vision loss. These are just a few of the mounting stories we are hearing from our health care professionals as they attempt to fulfill their calling to help and to heal.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers in the health care and social service industries services experience the highest rates of injuries caused by workplace violence and are five times as likely to get injured at work than the overall workforce. Incidence rates of workplace violence against health care workers have increased nationally almost every year for more than a decade. Some recent survey data underscore these trends:

- A 2022 national survey of emergency physicians from the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) shows that violence in the emergency department (ED) has greatly increased – contributing to rising rates of health care worker burnout and harming patient care. An astounding 85% of emergency physicians believe the rate of violence experienced in EDs has increased over the past five years, with 45% indicating it has greatly increased. Additionally, two thirds of emergency physicians report being assaulted in the past year alone (66%) – with a third of these resulting in injury and more than a third disclosing they have been assaulted more than once.
- A 2021 survey of registered nurses from the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses found that 44% of RNs reported physical abuse and 68% reported verbal abuse during the first part of the pandemic (February and June 2020). This rise in threats as well as incidents of violence toward health care workers is not only causing injuries, distress and lost time from work, but also exacerbating burnout and leading them to leave positions of direct patient care at an alarming rate. Nearly a third of all nurses planned to leave their current job by the end of

2022- citing stress and burnout as the top reason for leaving according to a recent survey via the nurse hiring platform, Incredible Health.

We have introduced this legislation after input from multiple interested parties and stakeholders, including health care and law enforcement professionals. It is our hope that this bill will be a major step toward reducing workplace violence and strengthening our health care environments so that these vital workers feel safe, supported, and valued for the tremendous impact they make day in and day out in our local communities. And ultimately, the Health Care Workplace Safety Act should in turn pay great dividends in helping to mitigate the crisis we are facing in recruiting and retaining our health care workforce.

I'll turn it over to my joint sponsor, Representative Rachel Baker, herself a long-time health care professional, to offer her testimony.

Thank you, Representative White, and I am honored to introduce this legislation that I know is a step in the right direction to supporting our healthcare workers. I am a nurse who continues to work in a hospital system and I have experienced and seen firsthand the increasing violence occurring in healthcare settings. I have heard nurses and healthcare workers say things implying that experiencing violence is just part of the job. This is unacceptable and as a state it is critical that we work to support those providing direct care to patients, which is exactly what House Bill 452 aims to do.

This bill specifically does four things:

- First, it directs every hospital to establish a plan for preventing workplace violence and managing aggressive behaviors which must be developed by an interdisciplinary team that includes direct care employees. There are several required components of the plans that are detailed in the bill. The plans must be reviewed and evaluated annually by the interdisciplinary team.
- Second, it requires that hospitals establish a workplace violence incident reporting system that is used to make improvements in preventing workplace violence. The reporting system must include guidelines for when and how to report incidents to the employer, security agencies, law enforcement and with a policy stating there can be no discrimination or retaliation related to reporting incidents.
- Third, it establishes the ability of hospital security personnel to receive access to online security training currently available to Ohio peace officers
- Finally, it directs the Department of Higher Education to survey colleges and universities that provide education to students seeking to become health care providers, including medical students, nursing students, and allied health students, to evaluate the current education and training included in their curriculums on the prevention of workplace violence. The results of this survey will be returned to the general assembly.

As a nurse myself, I know firsthand the importance of our staff being protected. We need a safe working environment for the sustainability of healthcare delivery in Ohio. Through collaboration with many stakeholders, we believe that we developed a bill that will be a positive step in creating safe work environments for our healthcare professionals.

Chair Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee, thank you again for allowing us to testify. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.