



**HB 452 – Healthcare Workplace Safety Act**

**Proponent Testimony by Jacinta Tucker, RN**

**Ohio Nurses Association**

Good morning, Chairperson Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee. My name is Jacinta Tucker, and I am a registered nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at Cleveland Clinic Union Hospital and a proud member of the Ohio Nurses Association.

The Ohio Nurses Association has been the voice of Ohio's registered nurses since 1904, and we are now celebrating our 120th anniversary. Today, ONA still serves as the only voice for all of Ohio's nearly 200,000 RNs. ONA's nurses and health professionals have molded the nursing and healthcare landscape in Ohio since the beginning of the 20th century, which is what brings us here again today.

I am here to speak on the critical issue of workplace violence in our hospitals and to advocate for Ohio House Bill 452 (HB 452). This bill represents a significant step toward addressing the escalating violence healthcare workers face daily, but it needs some changes to make it stronger and more effective.

During my years of nursing, I have personally witnessed the horror of a shooting in our ER, where the sounds of gunshots echoed through the halls, leaving our nurses and staff paralyzed with fear. The aftermath saw many of my colleagues traumatized and fearful of returning to work. They had to contend with the very real threat of violence in a place meant to heal.

Another tragic incident that haunts me to this day involved a patient who committed suicide just outside the ER doors at tables meant for visitors and staff to take a breather or have lunch. This happened in broad daylight, with the ER bustling. The scene was harrowing, and it cast a long shadow over our hospital community, reminding us all of the vulnerabilities we face daily.

Our staff have been hit, spit on, kicked, and injured while trying to provide care. Families, overwhelmed with emotion, have threatened, cursed, and even physically shoved staff, disrupting the very care they demanded. I recall a time when security had to escort an irate family in and out of the unit, their voices ringing with curses and threats, leaving everyone on edge.

These incidents are not isolated. They underscore the urgent need for HB 452 to provide a safer working environment for healthcare workers.

HB 452 proposes essential measures to safeguard our healthcare workforce, including mandatory security plans, an incident reporting system, and enforceable standards against aggressive behaviors in hospitals. These security plans must be reviewed annually and submitted to the Ohio Department of Health to ensure compliance and effectiveness. While these provisions are a good start, we believe that this bill can and must be improved to provide the protection our healthcare workers desperately need.

- Firstly, we must mandate that all Ohio hospitals offer annual training on workplace violence prevention, identification, and response. This training should be compulsory for all employees upon hiring and whenever there are policy changes related to workplace safety. By equipping our staff with the knowledge and skills to handle violent situations, we can create a safer environment for everyone.
- Secondly, workplace safety committees must include at least half of their members as direct care providers. These committees should also reserve seats for patient rights advocates and representatives from collective bargaining units if applicable. By involving those who are directly affected and those who advocate for patient and worker rights, we can ensure that the measures put in place are practical and effective.
- Thirdly, for de-escalation techniques, each hospital unit requires a designated number of trained individuals based on the unit's bed count, with higher-risk areas requiring more. These measures should be adaptable by hospital administrators, who can exceed these minimums in response to higher violence rates. Properly

trained staff can defuse potentially violent situations, preventing harm to both healthcare workers and patients.

- Additionally, we need to criminalize the use of bodily fluids as weapons against hospital personnel. This should include outlining specific penalties and procedural requirements for offenders, such as mandatory health testing and potential financial liability for testing costs. Using bodily fluids as weapons is a grievous assault that poses severe health risks, and it must be treated with the seriousness it deserves.

Every day, without these protections, healthcare workers face unacceptable risks that lead to too many leaving the profession. This is a threat to our staff's safety and patient care quality. When experienced healthcare workers leave the profession due to violence, it creates gaps in care and strains the remaining staff, ultimately affecting patient outcomes.

HB 452 is our opportunity to combat this escalating issue, and your leadership is crucial. By supporting and strengthening this bill, we can create a safer, more supportive environment for healthcare workers and ensure they can continue to provide the high-quality care that our patients deserve.

Thank you for your time, and I urge you to support HB 452. Our healthcare workers deserve nothing less than a safe and supportive work environment.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.