



HB 452 – Healthcare Workplace Safety Act

Written Testimony by James Joseph, RN

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Good morning, Chairperson Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee. My name is James Joseph, I have worked as a registered nurse in the state of Ohio since 1985, and we are literally surviving one shift at a time.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed our profession advance beyond what I could have imagined at a rapid pace. However, with this growth come growing pains and areas needing significant improvement. One aspect that has not advanced in nearly 40 years of practice is our safety while working. In the past, despite external circumstances, there was a sense of safety within the hospital walls. There was a belief that all good faith efforts were made to ensure our safety and freedom from violence. Any deviation from this was an exception, not the rule.

As I near the final quarter of my career, I reflect on those days with a sense of ignorant bliss. Today, I am keenly aware of my environment from the moment I leave my small town and begin the drive to work. Courtesy on the roads, in parking lots, and in general has diminished. Once I leave my vehicle and head for the hospital doors, my awareness heightens to an acute level, sometimes triggering a flight-or-fight response. Inside, staff members battle for the time clock while unmanned hospital doors remain open to anyone who wishes to enter.

The shift has not yet begun, but anxiety is already building for the next confrontation looming ahead. On a good day, the staff is civil, administrators are transparent, and only a few patients threaten us. On a normal day, this is not the case. It is astounding that after 40 years in a profession vital to saving lives, we now experience workplace

violence in every imaginable form—from patients, visitors, strangers, other staff, and even administrators.

Patient violence towards nurses manifests in various ways. Verbal assaults targeting our sex, age, gender, size, clothing, and disabilities are daily occurrences. Patients and visitors threaten us with words, use administrator names to intimidate us, and manipulate us into actions contrary to the healthcare team's decisions. Physical assaults are numerous as well. One staff member was chased down the hall with a laptop and thrown into a wall, breaking her spinal vertebrae. Despite the severity of this incident, the patient was given every consideration, while the staff member received no protection.

Recently, a teammate and I approached a patient to perform a minor bedside procedure he had previously agreed to. Upon entering his room, he shouted obscenities, postured as if to punch us, and filled his urinal with urine, causing us to exit in fear of being attacked. As we rushed out, he continued shouting obscenities, creating a humiliating and sad experience for my coworkers and me. Other patients and visitors witness these escalating assaults, leaving us at a loss for words as we simply move on.

Every day, staff members are hit, slapped, punched, kicked, and verbally assaulted. These are the behaviors we endure while striving to make positive impacts on lives and healthcare outcomes. It is time for change.

To address this issue, we must unite in demanding stronger protections for healthcare workers. We need comprehensive policies that ensure our safety and hold aggressors accountable that go beyond the provisions of HB452 – but it is a good start.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.