

HB 452 – Healthcare Workplace Safety Act

Written Testimony by Shani Simmers, MS, BSN, MT(ASCP), CLS

Good morning, Chairperson Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Public Health Policy Committee. My name is Shani Simmers and I want to share with you my story about how workplace violence almost ended my life and changed me both professionally and personally. Healthcare workplace violence needs to stop NOW.

God carried me through when I needed extra strength, along with my nurse colleagues, to fight for our lives as we were being physically assaulted and strangled by a patient. Nurses and all healthcare workers should not have to tolerate or accept this. When a healthcare worker is assaulted and injured physically and mentally, their medical bills, employment, and safety should not be dragged through bureaucracy; it feels like being dragged on the floor by our hair. I am thankful and express my GRATITUDE and Glory to God, Tina, Mary, Michelle, and all the support that family and friends provided me as I continue to recover from this horrible felonious crime against us. Glory to Him for continuing to give me the strength, perseverance, and tenacity to see Him when I need Him most and follow His light to transform my life with gratitude.

Now, four years after being assaulted while employed as a Registered Nurse, I am faced with knowing this felon will be released. This was not the first time he had served time for assault; he had a previous domestic violence conviction with time in Indiana. But since this was his first “healthcare workplace violence” incident, even though he assaulted four female healthcare workers in one incident, the laws favored him, not us, the victimized healthcare workers.

I was informed by the Licking County Sheriff’s Office Victim Advocate Mark Weiner that this was the most violent assault by a patient on healthcare workers in this county. It was not in the local or Columbus news; the facility stated they were “trying to protect us.” The facility may not have even reported this event to a government agency. During the assault, I believed one of my coworkers had died while I fought for my life (she did live, but I did not know that during the assault). The facility filed the police report at the incorrect location, but two of us kept the focus on getting charges against this person, and finally, the four of us women were successful, with the help of Mark Weiner, in bringing this event to the grand jury. We were all thrown into the legal system without any support from our employer. With the four of us women in front of a grand jury, he was charged with four second-degree felonies with a \$500,000 bond.

We all carry this trauma with us to this day. One nurse’s teenage son was dying from cancer at the time, and due to her injuries, she was not able to care for him as she did before. Her son passed away. The tech, who I thought was dead, is not able to

communicate with us; I assume we are triggering. I had to see a Bureau of Workers' Compensation psychologist, who mentioned non-relevant things in my childhood that "possibly" led to why I was assaulted that day and dealing with PTSD. It was a very long battle during the assault and in the years since. I have had several jobs since then, but I put in the "work" to heal.

This felon will be released from Belmont Correctional Facility before mid-summer. I continue to pay for medical bills related to the assault. Healthcare workplace violence is something that was NEVER brought up in any of my healthcare degrees, including my RN. I have felt nursing burnout since, and I look forward to retirement, but I still enjoy being able to care for patients. Please tell me if it is right for healthcare workers, including nurses, to put our lives on the line when we went into this profession to care for patients, not to fight for our lives!

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