

Interested Party Testimony on HB452

Ron Smith

Chairman Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the committee, I stand before you today, deeply rooted in a family that values service above self. As a Marine, father of a soldier and a Marine, and the father of Tristin Kate Smith, a dedicated nurse, my family has always believed in serving others with unwavering commitment.

My name is Ron Smith. I am here today to talk about my youngest daughter, Tristin Kate Smith, who was 28 years old when she took her own life in August of last year. Tristin was a beacon of compassion, dedicating herself to the care of others as an ER nurse for five years. But beneath her dedication lay a burden too heavy to bear.

As we were going through her house, we found a letter titled "A letter to my Abuser." The abuser she referred to was not a person but the health care administration. This letter, which has since gone viral, has resonated deeply within the nursing community. In her letter, Tristin highlighted the dire lack of security in her workplace. She spoke of the emotional volatility in ERs, where family members and patients, in their distress, often turned their anger toward the very nurses trying to help them.

Tristin recounted incidents of nurses being hit and then questioned about what they had done or failed to do to prevent such attacks. She wrote, "The law doesn't protect us and neither do you," addressing the health care administration that should have safeguarded her and her colleagues.

My question to all of us today is simple: Why are there no laws to protect our nurses? Why do we allow the people who dedicate their lives to saving ours to work in environments where their safety is not guaranteed? Why are there no metal detectors at the entrances of Emergency Rooms and the main entrances of our hospitals? Is it because it would cost too much? Or perhaps because it might tarnish the reputation of the hospital?

Tristin's letter is a cry for help that went unheard. It is a stark reminder that our health care system is failing those who stand on its front lines. Nurses like Tristin are asked to give their all, often without adequate support, protection, or appreciation. This negligence has deadly consequences.

We need to do better. We can do better. Our nurses deserve to feel safe at work. They deserve laws that protect them, security measures that safeguard them, and a health care administration that values their lives as much as the lives they save.

Today, I call on each of you to join me in this fight. Let us demand better security measures in our hospitals. Let us push for legislation that protects our nurses from workplace violence.

And don't stop there. I urge you to support HB285 which will give nurses the minimum staffing standards they deserve. Let us ensure that no other family has to endure the pain of losing a loved one because we failed to act.

Tristin's life was a testament to service, dedication, and compassion. Let us honor her memory by making sure that every nurse feels safe, valued, and protected. Together, we can create a health care system that truly cares for its caregivers. Thank you.