



HB 452 – Healthcare Workplace Safety Act

Proponent Testimony by Rick Lucas, President & Executive Director

Ohio Nurses Association

Good afternoon Chairperson Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Veterans and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Rick Lucas, and I serve as a Critical Care and Rapid Response Nurse at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. I am also the President and Executive Director of the Ohio Nurses Association.

Today, I come before you on behalf of the Ohio Nurses Association to declare what should be an indisputable truth: **workplace violence is not part of the job**. Yet, for far too many nurses and healthcare professionals in Ohio, it has become a daily, unrelenting reality. From physical assaults to verbal threats, from sexual harassment to being attacked with bodily fluids—this is what we face. And it is a crisis that we can no longer ignore.

We are punched, kicked, scratched, sexually assaulted, and sprayed with bodily fluids—all while trying to save lives. Nurses are the ones who hold the hands of patients in their most vulnerable moments, who fight to keep people alive, and who work tirelessly through long shifts under stressful conditions. Yet, we are also the ones who are routinely attacked by patients and visitors, subjected to brutal and degrading assaults every single day.

This violence is not only physical. It's verbal, emotional, and sexual. Nurses face constant threats, insults, and harassment. We endure everything from being yelled at, cursed at, and threatened with weapons, to being subjected to sexual harassment and assault in the middle of our work. And all the while, we continue to show up for our patients, caring for them with compassion and dedication, despite the trauma we are forced to endure.

Hospitals and healthcare settings should be sanctuaries for healing, where patients are treated with care and respect, and where healthcare workers can perform their duties in safety. But today, the reality is far different. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2020), healthcare workers account for a staggering 73% of all nonfatal workplace injuries caused by violence. This is not an outlier; this is an ongoing, widespread crisis that has reached epidemic proportions.

And yet, despite the overwhelming evidence and countless stories from nurses across the state, hospital administrators continue to treat this violence as if it is simply "part of the job."

Hospital executives choose to turn a blind eye to the daily trauma faced by their staff, failing to implement adequate security measures, comprehensive training, or the necessary protections to ensure that healthcare workers are safe. The message is clear: the safety of the workers is secondary to the bottom line. Our lives and well-being are being sacrificed for the sake of profits. Enough.

Imagine this:

- If, on your walk to the Statehouse today, someone shoved you to the ground or pinned you against the wall in the stairwell, they'd be arrested for assault. But when it happens to me or my coworkers, it's brushed off as "part of the job." Or, even worse, your supervisor asks you what *you* could have done better, shaming and blaming you as the victim.
- If someone weaponized urine or feces against you on your way to this hearing, they would be dragged out in handcuffs. But for healthcare workers, this behavior is tolerated, and we are told it's part of the job. Even worse, some of us have been threatened by administrators with the possibility of discipline for reporting these crimes, citing HIPAA as a reason to stay silent. This twisted interpretation of patient privacy laws is used to intimidate frontline staff into enduring violence in silence, further exposing the systemic failure of healthcare institutions to protect those who provide care.
- If you went home with bruises or trauma from a violent incident, there would be outrage. Yet for us, this violence is a daily expectation—just another shift we're supposed to endure. You'd have time to recover, but we finish our shifts battered, bruised, and broken, and get up the next day to do it all again—out of fear of reprisal and harsh attendance policies. **WE ARE NOT MACHINES. WE ARE HUMANS.**

These aren't just statistics. These are real-life experiences. I have been assaulted at work and then asked what I could have done better to prevent it. I've endured the excruciating delays of the workers' compensation system, waiting for approvals that would never happen with private insurance. And I've seen my colleagues—brave, compassionate, skilled—cry in break rooms, not because of the demands of patient care, but because they are terrified of returning to a workplace that is increasingly unsafe.

Sexual assault is also a grave and often silent threat in our workplaces. Nurses have been groped, harassed, and even cornered by patients or visitors. Too often, these violations are

excused, minimized, or swept under the rug with the justification that the perpetrator didn't know better or that the patient was confused or impaired.

Let me be clear. Being stressed, confused, or impaired is **NOT** a license to grope someone's breast—or engage in any other violent or unwelcome behavior. **No one**—no one—should be expected to endure this kind of trauma, yet it happens. It happens to us. We are expected to continue working, to provide care, to put patients first while our own safety and dignity are violated.

The truth is that hospitals could take meaningful action today to stop this crisis. They could hire enough security staff to protect us. They could install metal detectors to prevent weapons from entering the facility. They could implement training programs and equip us with the protective gear we need. But they are choosing not to act. They are choosing to prioritize profits over our lives, over our safety, and over the safety of the very patients we are entrusted to care for. **Enough.**

House Bill 452 is a crucial first step in addressing this crisis. But we must strengthen it. To truly protect healthcare workers and improve patient care, I urge you to consider the following amendments:

- **Mandatory Violence Prevention Training:** Every hospital in Ohio should be required to provide annual training on violence prevention, identification, and response. This training should be mandatory for all employees upon hiring and updated regularly.
- **Workplace Safety Committees with Direct Care Providers:** Hospital safety committees must include at least 50% direct care providers—nurses, physicians, and other frontline staff. These committees should also include patient rights advocates and representatives from collective bargaining units where applicable, to ensure that those most impacted by violence have a voice in the decisions that affect their safety.
- **Designated De-Escalation Experts on Every Unit:** Amend Section 3727.18(B)(3) to require hospitals to have trained de-escalation staff on every high-risk unit. Psychiatric, emergency, and other high-risk units should have additional personnel to address the heightened risks of violence in those settings.
- **Criminal Penalties for Weaponizing Bodily Fluids:** We must hold those who weaponize bodily fluids accountable. Make this a fifth-degree felony, with mandatory health testing and financial penalties for offenders who put healthcare workers at risk.

The healthcare system in Ohio is in crisis. Nurses and other healthcare professionals are leaving the field in droves, unable to endure the constant threat of violence and the systemic failure to protect them. This only worsens Ohio's staffing crisis and puts patient care at risk. This is not just a staffing issue—it's a safety issue, a human rights issue, and a patient care issue. **We cannot wait any longer, and neither should you.**

Passing and strengthening HB452 will send a loud, clear message that **violence is NOT part of the job.** Nurses and healthcare workers deserve workplaces where they are safe, respected, and valued, so they can focus on what matters most: providing the best possible care to their patients. **It also signals to hospital executives that they can no longer get away with their neglect and disregard for our safety.**

Thank you for your time and commitment to this critical issue.

I welcome any questions you may have.