

2015 02 16

Madame Chair and members of this committee,

I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 132 in order to protect the people who take care of you and your family from serious injury and even death. This is an emergency.

I'll start with a story. At 3 in the morning, a nurse is called to unclog a patient's IV line. As this nurse was leaning over the patient's arm doing her job, the man closed his fist and slugged her in the head. In one moment this nurse is performing CPR and delivering drugs that bring dead people back to life and in the next moment is slugged in the head by a disgruntled man. While she only suffered a mild concussion, what if she had been pregnant? Or what if he had broken her jaw or nose? I know several peers who have been seriously injured and a close friend who was stomped unconscious. Nurses and health care workers are not martial artists; our art is in life and wellness. We are mothers, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers.

How ironic is it that a place where babies are being born and lives are being saved is one of the most violent and dangerous places to work in Oregon. Health care workers experience sanctuary trauma which is a term used to describe a place that should be safe, but instead is dangerous and violent. By not protecting ourselves, we are also telling our customers that we probably will not be able to protect them either.

In 1979, 35 years ago, I began my health care career in Roseburg, OR working in a group home with developmentally disabled adults released to the community from Fairview Training Center. Since then, I have worked in every mental and physical health environment there is as a CNA, TECH, LPN and now a Master's Prepared RN. I have worked in a number of group homes, the school system, the Oregon State Hospital, MacLaren Correctional Facility, Marion County Jail and detention, the Oregon State Penitentiary and a handful of hospitals.

I have presented on workplace violence related to health care workers nationally, internationally and am actively engaged in a significant amount of committee work related to eliminating that violence. I have a certain expertise in both being assaulted and in the prevention of violence. As a health care worker, I should know nothing about violence, let alone develop expertise.

While I was reflecting on this bill, I thought about other professions. Baristas and librarians would never tolerate what we accept as part of our job. It struck me that I have been verbally and physically assaulted more times than I have purchased coffee at Starbucks—since I have been around much longer than they have.

Our society needs an attitude adjustment. Without clear guidance in the form of laws, public safety, the judicial system and the health care administration lack the mental model to think about and respond to this form of violence. Laws have changed our attitude towards seat belts, domestic violence and racial injustice. This law will make an impulsive person think twice about assaulting health care workers and hold them accountable for violence.

That story I told recently happened to my wife. In Oregon, *simple involvement* in animal fighting (that means spectators or the guy who collects admission money) is a Class C felony § 167.355. If it becomes law, this bill will give the same respect to the health care profession as we do to dogs. Help us focus on being wellness artists.

.

Thank You

Michael Polacek, MSn, RN-BC

2310 Cottage St SE

Salem, OR 97302

fetchwood@gmail.com

503.930.3698