

Chair Monnes Anderson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,



My name is Bill Schueler. I am an emergency nurse and the immediate president of the Oregon Emergency Nurses Association. Thank you for allowing us the time to address you today.

Violence in healthcare is rampant and it is a problem. The Bureau of Labor Statistic states that violence in healthcare is almost 4 times the rate of violence of any business in the private sector, and it is climbing. It has been well-studied that healthcare violence is under-reported so it is expected that this incidence rate is much higher.

Oregon's House Bill 2022 required violence reporting in 2008. One hundred percent of hospitals reported; showing 1,061 assaults, 99.5% of which occurred in the hospital setting.

The Emergency Nurses Association's two-year Emergency Department Violence Surveillance Study (2011) showed that 54.5% of surveyed emergency nurses experienced physical assault and/or verbal abuse within a 7-day period of work.

Assaults on healthcare personnel can be frightening, debilitating, and career-ending. They interrupt the entire healthcare process, affect the safety of the patients and staff, and come with a great price of apprehension, fear, guilt, and pain.

We have been witness to discouragement from law enforcement, district attorneys, hospital administrators and judges. We have watched the lack of enforcement of current law. We have been hurt, we have bled, and we have been broken. We ask that those who *intentionally, knowingly or recklessly* cause harm to hospital healthcare workers be held accountable for their behaviors.

Senate Bill 132 asks that assaults against hospital healthcare employees be classified as a class C felony, which is punishable with up to 5 years imprisonment, a \$125,000 fine, or both. To date, 35 states have similar laws with enhanced penalties for those who would assault healthcare workers in the line of duty. This year, California, Colorado, Massachusetts and South Dakota are looking to pass similar legislation.

Washington State currently has enhanced penalties to those who would commit violence against healthcare workers. Is it fair that employees of the same health system get enhanced protections in Washington State, while in Oregon no enhanced protections exist? We think not.

We need your help. We are working on our end to decrease violence in healthcare with education, training and awareness.

The Oregon Emergency Nurses Association asks that you allow this bill to move forward.

Thank you.

William Schueler, MSN, RN, CEN
Immediate Past President – Oregon Emergency Nurses Association
12945 SW Thunderhead Way
Beaverton, OR 97008 bill.schueler@gmail.com

Attached: Written testimony of Chuck Westlund and Barb Ward