



HB 2620
March 7, 2017
Jennifer Barr, RN, DNP

Chair Barker and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Barr and I am writing today to ask for your support for HB 2620, with ONA's proposed amendment. As a registered nurse, I have seen and experienced firsthand the potentially dangerous situations our health care workers experience. Workers in a healthcare setting are more than 4 times more likely to be injured as a result of workplace violence than all workers in the private sector combined. Steps to implement a comprehensive solution must be taken to protect our healthcare workers.

HB 2620 makes knowingly assaulting a health care worker a Class C felony. **Although this is a step in the right direction, it is not enough.** We must encourage and enforce stronger, evidence based support to end work place violence as outlined in ONA's proposed amendment.

In my personal experience, the workplace violence I have seen or experienced comes from patients who are mentally altered. In fact, employees in mental health and emergency departments are particularly vulnerable to abuse; one study found that over 50% of the participating emergency department nurses experienced verbal or physical abuse. We must have increased security measures in these departments. Furthermore, I believe that having one security personal working in the emergency room is unacceptable; if incidents occur in other areas of the hospital that take this security personal away from their post in the emergency room or mental health unit, this leaves workers in that area even more vulnerable to violence.

During my first year as a registered nurse, I experience workplace violence while working the night shift. A patient of mine, who was confused, had gotten up independently to visit the restroom. He was unsteady and a great fall risk, so I responded to his bed alarm and found him in the bathroom. In attempting to get him from the bathroom back to his bed, he became agitated and grabbed me around my neck. Due to the nature of the room set up; I was trapped in the bathroom and unable to make a quick escape. Fortunately, one of my male colleagues was right outside the room and responded to my cry for help immediately. Our one security guard on duty that evening was engaged in a situation in the emergency room and that time and I was thankful the situation did not escalate, as that the security guard was unavailable to help.

Similarly, I was working on the same unit when a coworker of mine was physical assaulted by a patient. The patient had a seizure, and had a known history of being violent immediately following a seizure. While admitted for observation, the patient had another seizure, and the nurse who was responding to his seizure, in an attempt to keep the patient safe, was punched in the face by that patient. That nurse was out of work for three weeks. If a security guard had been assigned to that patient, knowing he had a history of violence, the situation could have been deescalated in a safer manner.



HB 2620 is critical to ensuring the safety of our healthcare workers. I ask that for myself and on behalf of all other healthcare workers, you strongly consider supporting this bill.