



## **Testimony in Support of SB 823**

March 20, 2019

Senate Committee on Health Care

Jennifer Barr, DNP, RN, FNP-C

Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice-Chair Linthicum and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Barr and I am writing today to ask for your support for Senate Bill 823, with the forthcoming proposed amendments. As a registered nurse and nurse practitioner, I have seen and experienced firsthand the potentially dangerous situations health care workers experience. Between 2002 to 2013, health care workers were victims of serious workplace violence incidents requiring days off for injury at a rate of 4 times that in the private sector.

We must strengthen the current statute that requires the collection and tracking of data. Currently, it is not required that this data be reported or made available to workplace staff to view. This is completely unacceptable; employees have a right to know their risk for experience violence by simply coming to work. Additionally, required reporting and disclosure of this data would allow for analysis of the trends and for more targeted interventions at reducing work place violence. For example, if the data shows these events are more likely to occur during nursing change of shift, hospitals can “up staff” for these time periods.

In my personal experience, the workplace violence I have seen or experienced comes primarily 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.

During my first year as a registered nurse, I experienced 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.

SB 823 is critical to ensuring the continued safety of our healthcare workers and for evaluating current practices around the state regarding reduction of workplace violence. I ask that for



myself and on behalf of all other healthcare workers, you support this bill with the forthcoming proposed amendment language.

Thank you.

Jennifer Barr, DNP, RN, FNP-C