



Testimony in Support of SB 823

March 20, 2019

Senate Committee on Health Care

Laurel Hallock Koppelman, DNP, FNP-C, APRN

Thank you for accepting my written testimony in support of Senate Bill 823, with the forthcoming proposed amendments. My name is Dr. Laurel Hallock Koppelman, and I am a nurse practitioner working at Oregon Health and Science University. I cannot be present today because I'm attending a conference in Washington, D.C. for the National Institutes of Health meeting on treating substance use disorder. But this subject matter today is too important to not comment.

I became a nurse practitioner after being a staff nurse for many years. It was here at the bedside when I first became aware of the workplace violence health care workers are subjected to and often made to experience and then go about their day as if it's "business as usual."

Ten years ago this month, I was working on the floor in a busy medical surgical unit. One of the patients was scheduled for discharge; he and his family were unhappy about this and as I rounded the corner to pass meds to one of my own patients, his sister exited his room screaming that he had fallen. I immediately stopped and ran to the room where he was found lying on the floor. He was conscious, held his arm up for his blood pressure when asked and another nurse and I attempted to get him up from the floor. He started to moan in pain. That's when the patient's sister jumped on my back and started to shake and strike me. It took a few minutes for others to arrive and remove her from me. Public safety was called. The officer asked me if I was ok, I thought I was. It was a weekend so there wasn't a manager. I was not asked to fill out an incident report. The public safety officer allowed the sister to remain with the patient. For the rest of the 12 hour shift I felt scared, bruised in my neck and back but a duty not to abandon my own patients.

A week later I started to have vision problems in my right eye. I noticed flashes and blurriness but also a dark curtain arising. I went to the eye doctor who told me I had a retinal detachment. This is when the back of the eye separates from the cornea. It often happens during a trauma. But I had not filed a report. I had not been encouraged to file a report by the safety officer, by my manager, by the charge nurse or by administration. So I was unable to connect what had happened to me a week earlier with what was happening now.

A retinal detachment is quite serious, actually. I didn't know it at the time because I was young. I had a surgery to repair the retina and had to keep my head face down for 6 weeks and lift nothing more than 10 pounds. I had also just given birth 5 months prior so was unable to lift my newborn to breastfeed her. I had purchased disability insurance so was able to be paid a total of \$165.00 a week, instead of my usual hourly wage when I was able to work. Sadly the surgery did not work and I had another surgery one month later. That also failed and had a side effect of silicone oil induced glaucoma at the age of 36. Two surgeries later, I now have a permanent valve to remove fluid from my eye to reduce the migraine inducing pressures, and am also completely blind in that eye. Four surgeries. And I could no longer work at the bedside as lifting more than 50 pounds can cause significant damage.

But, I will also be a nurse so used this moment to become a nurse practitioner. I went back to school to get a graduate degree and a doctoral degree and now have my own panel of over 900



patients primarily served by Medicare. I received the

from the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and most recently a prestigious grant to establish a program to treat substance use disorder in the Emergency Room and provide 24 hour access to a primary care setting.

the Oregon Health Plan or 2019 NP excellence award

I am happy where I am, and I wouldn't change becoming a nurse practitioner for anything. I still get to be a nurse. But I would change how I got here. It wasn't fair. It wasn't just. And it didn't need to happen. If my hospital had been required to report the injury, I may have qualified for workman's compensation or even victim's compensation. If my hospital had been required to report the injury, there may have been more training for staff and public safety and safeguards in place for potentially dangerous patients or family members.

Health care workers are nearly four times more likely to be injured as a result of workplace violence than all other industries. I don't have a chance to change what happened to me, but you have a chance to make a change for our nursing future.

Please support Senate Bill 823, with the forthcoming amendments.

Laurel Hallock Koppelman, DNP, FNP-C, APRN

hallockk@ohsu.edu