



Testimony in Support of SB 823 A

May 16, 2019

House Committee on Health Care

Katherine Luers, RN

Chair Salinas, Vice Chairs Nosse and Hayden and Members of the Committee,

My name is Katie Luers and I am a registered nurse and Oregon Nurses Association member working at Providence Portland Medical Center. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 823 A.

I'm supporting the Oregon Health Care Worker Protection Act because, as nurses, we far too often experience violence and abuse as a daily part of the job. In my work as a Neurology nurse, I frequently deal with confused and disoriented patients. One day, I was caring for a confused gentleman with alcoholic dementia. We had a good working relationship all day long, and as we were short staffed, I agreed to stay an additional 4 hours beyond my 12-hour shift to help care for the patients.

As the sun went down, my patient became increasingly agitated, paranoid, and impulsive -- a phenomenon familiar to many night shift nurses. As the night went on, he made statements indicating he believed his medication was poisonous and that hospital staff were planning on killing him. I continued to reorient and reassure him. The patient got out of bed and his bed alarm went off. I ran into the room to keep him safe, as he was quite unsteady. Although my hospital provides training in de-escalation and preventing assaultive behavior for nurses, I was not on my guard, since I worked with this gentleman successfully all day.

He was startled and also believed I was trying to keep him in the hospital to kill him. He grabbed me by the windpipe. I was shocked by how difficult it was to break his hold or just back out of the room. I called for help and my colleagues arrived immediately to intervene. They called a Code Gray and our excellent security staff arrived within 2 minutes with their expertise to intervene and calm patients down as a vital part of our therapeutic interdisciplinary team.

Because of the procedures in place, I was lucky that I was not physically injured, but the experience traumatized me. I was surprised by how long lasting the emotional effects were. I now feel vulnerable with patients in a way I did not before this incident.

While no one piece of legislation can fully stop incidences like this, SB 823 A is an important step in the right direction. We must work to meaningfully treat substance abuse, increase access to comprehensive health care, and invest in community supports. But in the meantime, nurses like myself are getting injured and abused every day.

We know that the best way to limit violence is to enact comprehensive work place violence prevention programs, where hospital administrators, managers and security personnel are committed to solving the problem. SB 823 A would allow front line health care staff in hospitals and other direct care settings to have access to required data on previous assaults, it protects nurses like myself from being retaliated against for reporting an incident and requires a robust security assessment – a piece of our procedure that was critical in my situation.



We must use every tool made available to address the abuse health care workers experience all too frequently in patient care settings across the state. Therefore, I encourage your support for Senate Bill 823 A.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to submit testimony.

Katherine Luers, RN