



Testimony in Support of SB 823 A

May 16, 2019

House Committee on Health Care

Franky Valenzuela, RN

Chair Salinas, Vice-Chair Nosse and Hayden and Members of the Committee:

My name is Franky Valenzuela. I'm a registered nurse in the Emergency department at Sacred heart Riverbend hospital in Springfield Oregon. I have been a nurse for nine years and I've worked in the ER for the past 5 years.

In my experience as a nurse I've witnessed firsthand the abuse caregivers must deal with on a much too frequent basis. In the ER, staff is constantly dealing with mental health patients suffering from acute psychotic breaks, intoxicated and dangerous patients. I've had to help treat coworkers who have been injured by a patient. Often these incidents are reported internally but nothing ever comes from it. I've tried to encourage staff members who are victims of work place violence to press charges on patients only to find my request met with resistance.

With an aging workforce these injuries that are occurring in the workplace can be catastrophic for an employee and their family. These injuries can lead to a lifetime of pain and suffering. Many caregivers could be permanently injured or disabled and left unable to continue their current career. This kind of workplace violence must stop. Caregivers should feel valued and their voices and concerns should be heard.

Recently I've become a member of the Oregon Nurses Association bargaining committee to try and reach a fair contract with our administration. One of the top concerns our staff raised during a pre-negotiations survey was workplace violence. We've implored our administration to take workplace violence seriously and improve our workplace violence committee.

I was surprised that during the last 5 years with Peace Health and 4 years with Good Samaritan hospitals neither had active shooter training or drills. There used to be a time when churches, schools and hospitals were considered off limits and even safe havens. Unfortunately, not anymore. Instead these places have become more susceptible to risk and, at times, even susceptible to those seeking to inflict the most amount of damage on vulnerable individuals.

I raised this concern with our administration during negotiations. It was not until several weeks later that my concerns were validated. Two separate gun incidents within 24 hours of each other caused the hospital to go on lockdown. One incident involved a patient who was admitted to the cardiac unit and shot himself taking his own life. The second incident involved a man trying to enter the hospital with a long gun. That man was stopped in the lobby and eventually left leaving the rifle in a parking structure. He was later arrested a few blocks away trying to break into cars. Both incidents could have been so much worse.

These incidents led our administration to revisit our current policies and reevaluate our security measures. I've been informed that a private security consulting firm has been hired to help identify areas that are most vulnerable and improve our staff and patient's safety. I have also been informed that we will be conducting our first active shooter scenario training in the next 4-6 weeks. Unfortunately, it took two very serious gun-related incidents to implement these changes.



Our administration asked several in-state hospitals what security measures and trainings they provided their employees for these kinds of events. I was shocked to learn that many hospitals have very little or no training for active shooter scenarios. This needs to change. It's time for hospital administrations to be proactive instead of reactive to this very real threat.

I absolutely support Senate Bill 823 A. The nurses all over the state support Senate Bill 823 A. We insist that workplace violence be taken seriously, and meaningful changes be made to better aid in prevention and reducing harmful incidents.

Thank you very much.

Franky Valenzuela, RN