

Monday, May 9, 2022

NJ Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee

Statement of

Barbara Rosen, RN, HPAE First Vice President

In Support of A.3199 “The Health Care Heroes Violence Prevention Act”

Good afternoon my name is Barbara Rosen, I am the First Vice President of HPAE and a Registered Nurse. Thank you, Chairman Spearman and the members of the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee, for the opportunity to speak on this important matter. I am here today testifying in favor of A.[3199](#) known as the Health Care Heroes Violence Prevention Act.

Day in and day out, nurses, social workers and other health professionals working in our hospitals and nursing homes face threats and actual physical violence as ‘part of the job’. They report being kicked, punched, scratched, spit at and even beaten. But being verbally or physically assaulted doesn’t have to be part of the job, not if we set standards for our healthcare institutions.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) acknowledges what healthcare workers already know: Workplace violence in healthcare is a large, growing, and under-reported problem. As the crisis of workplace violence grows, so does its toll on caregivers, patients, and our entire healthcare system.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) more assaults (48 percent) occur in the health care and social services industry than any other.

Multiple surveys have highlighted the prevalence of workplace violence among healthcare occupations:

- Twenty one percent of registered nurses and nursing students reported being physically assaulted—and over 50 percent verbally abused—in a 12-month period (2014 American Nurses Association’s Health Risk Appraisal survey of 3,765 registered nurses and nursing students).¹
- Twelve percent of emergency department nurses experienced physical violence—and 59 percent experienced verbal abuse—during a seven-day period (2009–2011 Emergency Nurses Association survey of 7,169 nurses).²

OSHA, which is charged with maintaining safety in our nation’s workplaces, to enforce safe healthcare workplaces, does so with only voluntary recommendations and a general duty clause. OSHA has an exceedingly high bar before they can cite an employer for unsafe conditions due to violent assaults on healthcare workers.

¹ American Nurses Association. 2014. *American Nurses Association Health Risk Appraisal (HRA): Preliminary Findings October 2013–October 2014*

² Emergency Nurses Association and Institute for Emergency Nursing Research. 2010. *Emergency Department Violence Surveillance Study*

Violence doesn't just occur in mental health facilities, or in urban Emergency Rooms, or in isolated cases. In recent years, HPAE nurses have called on OSHA after workplace violence incidents in facilities from Bergen to Gloucester Counties. OSHA was helpful in advocating for safer workplaces, but in each case, the lack of clear standards made forcing compliance harder.

Our union also relies on our collective bargaining agreements and advocacy to enforce safety, and a strong violence prevention law passed in NJ in 2008. But, the NJ Department of Health does not have the capacity to fully enforce this law, which requires violence prevention policies, regular risk assessments, reporting, worker involvement, and assistance for workers harmed by violence.

So, we welcome Assemblyman Greenwald's legislation to take another key step in violence prevention. The key to this problem is prevention, so healthcare workers can continue to provide quality care for patients. If workers are injured due to violence, they are more likely to miss work to seek medical treatment and typically workers' compensation will have to pay the cost. This puts an increased strain on other staff during an already exacerbated worker shortage and a financial strain on our health systems.

These are the jobs we have chosen, knowing the hazards, but committed to our work. What we ask for, in turn, are reasonable measures to minimize our risks. It's time to treat workplace violence in healthcare settings with the seriousness this crisis warrants. If our hospitals and nursing homes are unsafe for workers, they are unsafe for our patients too. Healthcare workers, patients, and visitors deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your time today and I urge you to vote yes on A.3199.