

House Judiciary Committee
Jan. 28, 2025
HB 1341

Good morning, Chairman Klemin and members of the committee. My name is Carolyn Espe and I am asking you to vote yes on HB 1341. I have been a registered nurse since 2015 and have worked in various nursing capacities since that time.

In my time working with patients, I have been assaulted and have witnessed others being assaulted on the unit. As others have testified, as nurses, we do not have the ability to choose our patients. We work with compassion to care for others and to encourage wellness. We recognize that there are boundaries and that there are patients who live with mental health disorders who may assault. However, as a healthcare provider, I do think it is important that we hold patients who assault accountable in the healthcare setting.

Not only have I witnessed the physical injury from patients who assault, but also, I witness the aftermath of my coworkers who live with mental health issues like anxiety and depression resulting from physical assault. I have witnessed one coworker lose chunks of hair (due to a patient who was assaultive numerous times during their hospital stay), one coworker who experienced enormous swelling to her right temple (when she was hit squarely in the head by a patient), and several coworkers who experienced assaults from one patient who lives with a serious mental health disorder and frequently visits our unit. She assaulted several staff and was not held legally accountable for her actions. Once she was discharged to the State Hospital, she assaulted staff and was discharged to jail. Finally, one coworker told me that if she did not go to employee health after being assaulted, she would not be able to apply for disability when she was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) later in life. The serious issue of holding assaultive figures accountable is absolutely necessary.

Similar to Ms. Weiland, I have witnessed improvements to training, both in de-escalation techniques and in reading verbal cues. Regarding workplace violence, Sari et al. (2024) found that patient outcomes are less than appropriate when nurses feel they are not supported in pursuing the accountability of patients who assault. Ongoing violence (without consequences) generates fear Kafle et al. (2022). Furthermore, nurses may be encouraged not to report, which we know is underreporting, and this is exactly why we need you to vote yes on HB 1341.

Thank you for your time and your sincere attention to this House Bill.

Gratefully,

Carolyn Espe