

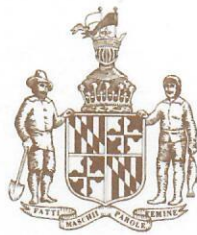
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The Senate of Maryland

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 8th, 2022

SBo298 - SUPPORT

Emergency Bill

Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

SB298 is an Emergency Bill establishing prohibitions, similar to those for elected officials, for threats made orally or in writing to a Maryland public health official or hospital staff member. Violations are a misdemeanor, subject to imprisonment (not exceeding 90 days) and/or a fine up to \$500.

Across the nation 70% of the states have enacted laws protecting public health officers against threats.¹ Maryland does not, even though all 24 of our local state health officers have experienced levels of harassment of the kind this bill will address; and with seven health officers having resigned largely due to threats and harassment over the last 3 years (Maryland Association of County Health Officials).

We need to do better at protecting our Maryland's State employees and hospital staff.

Since the COVID 19 pandemic began, public health officials and hospital staff nationwide have been subjected to increasing levels of threats and harassment for simply doing their jobs.² According to a CDC study nearly 25% of public health workers report feeling bullied, harassed or threatened due to their work since the pandemic began.³

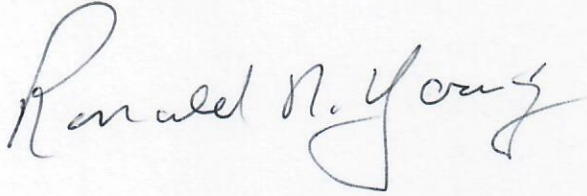
Both doctors and nurses are stretched thin, stressed out, and exhausted after almost 3 years of the pandemic. Before COVID19 the Maryland Nurses Association (MNA) survey indicated that 17% of nurses considered leaving the profession. Today, that number is 33%. "We are moving towards a critical nursing shortage within the state of Maryland," said Dr. Charlotte Wood, president of MNA.⁴

Nurses and physicians may take the brunt of the threats, but other ancillary hospital professionals and staff are increasingly on the receiving end of such behavior. Health care workers, who were once applauded for saving lives early in the COVID-19 outbreak, are now being issued panic buttons and ditching their scrubs before going out in public to avoid harassment. "If you have to fight with somebody about wearing a mask, or if they aren't allowed to visit a relative and we have

to argue about that, that is stressful.”⁵ Maryland law should ensure that our public health officials and hospital staff, who are acting in good faith, are respected and appreciated for their hard work.² It is for these reasons that SB298 includes the broad term “hospital staff” in its language.

I ask that you vote favorably on **SB298** to demonstrate that Maryland values civility and respectful treatment of our public health officials, medical personnel, and hospital staff.

Respectfully,



Senator Ronald Young

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