

SB 298

Diane M. McFarland, Frederick Health

Favorable

Dear State Senators and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Dr. Diane McFarland, and I am a Registered Nurse serving as the Chief Nursing Officer, Vice President of Patient Care Services at Frederick Health in Frederick, Maryland. I have been a registered nurse for 30 years with most of my career in the DMV area at both community and academic hospitals. During my career, I have worked as a clinical nurse in a Trauma/Surgical ICU, an Emergency Department, a Cardiac Step-Down unit, and in a Post Anesthesia Care unit. I have also worked as a Hospital Supervisor, a Nursing Director, and now in my current role as a Chief Nursing Officer. As my background and experience indicate, I have a strong knowledge and expertise in the professional practice of nursing.

The occurrence of verbal and physical assault has significantly increased since my career began 30 years ago. Many refer to the significant increase in assaults directed at healthcare workers as the "silent epidemic." I can attest that I have personally suffered verbal and physical abuse. I have been punched, kicked in the chest, bitten, and called every profanity known on many occasions. The American Nurses Association reports that 1 out of 4 nurses experience an assault on the job. For Frederick Health this means of our 1,112 registered nurses working within the health system, 278 experienced a physical or verbal assault.

Threats and assaults to nurses and other healthcare workers has exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic. At Frederick Health, we have seen a 190% increase in aggression and verbal abuse against healthcare workers since the start of the pandemic. In 2021, a total of 466 aggressive or threatening events that required a response from Security were reported at Frederick Health Hospital alone. This equates to 1.3 events per day, and these are the ones reported. Who knows what that number would be if unreported events were included?

Nurses want to provide compassionate and empathic care to patients. However, if physical and verbal assaults are not curtailed, many hospitals will be permanently understaffed. Nationally, its estimated that 500,000 nurses are expected to leave the profession by the end of 2022, creating a shortage of 1.1 million nurses. The "silent epidemic" is unknown to the public, but it is well-known among those who provide bedside care and organizations monitoring workplace violence. The healthcare industry leads all other sectors in the incidence of nonfatal workplace assaults. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare workers experience the highest rates of injuries caused by workplace violence and

are five times more likely to be injured due to workplace violence than workers in other industries. We cannot afford to lose any nurses due to assaults, verbal abuse, or threats.

Currently 38 states have established or increased penalties for assault of "nurses". Unfortunately, Maryland is not one of them. The passing of SB 298 is critical so we can protect and retain the dedicated, compassionate, and caring nursing workforce that are committed to caring for you, your families and fellow Marylanders. It is an honor to provide oral testimony on SB 298 which supports making it a misdemeanor to make or send a threat to a hospital staff member.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the voice of nursing in this important legislation, SB298.