

Senate Bill 105
Peace Orders – Workplace Violence

Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

POSITION: SUPPORT

The University of Maryland Medical System (“UMMS”) supports Senate Bill 105, Peace Orders – Workplace Violence. UMMS is a thirteen member hospital and health system that employs more than 28,000 people.

Senate Bill 105 would allow a victim’s employer to file a peace order on the employee’s behalf and keep the employee’s home address private.

This change is an important measure to keep people victims safe. Safety in this vein is especially of concern in healthcare, a high volume, high pressure, and high anxiety industry. Workers in health care settings are four times more likely to be victimized than other workers in other industries. Data from the Bureau of Labor show that violence-related injuries are four times more likely to cause healthcare workers to take time off from work than any other kind of injuries. The Joint Commission’s Sentinel Event data show 68 incidents of homicide, rape, or assault of hospital staff members over an eight-year period.

Alarming, the actual number of violent incidents involving healthcare workers is likely much higher than reported because reporting is voluntary. Medical professionals and healthcare personnel, especially in hospitals, are extremely vulnerable. The hospital environment is open to the public, and often tensions run high. Thus, healthcare workers are often the victims of assault in the workplace.

All too often, assault victims are terrified of the prospect of retaliation and may not seek a protective order for fear of escalating an assailant’s aggressive behavior. Allowing an employer, including a hospital, to obtain a protective order on behalf of an assault victim can protect the employee in the workplace and the employee’s privacy and security at home. Allowing an employer to file a protective order on an employee’s behalf also has the residual effect of protecting other employees and guests in the workplace as well.

It is of grave importance, now more than ever, that we protect our healthcare workers during these times. COVID-19 has presented the healthcare industry with unprecedented challenges. Many of our healthcare workers have been functioning under warzone-like circumstances. A 2020 Mental Health America study found that 93% of health care workers are experiencing stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and burnout due to work conditions brought on by the pandemic. The public is also responding to these stressful times as well. Sadly, the level of assault and victimization increases in stress-prone contexts.

This bill can help mitigate and interrupt the cycle of retaliatory violence, protect a witness from becoming a secondary victim and build trust between victims and the judiciary system. This legislation will provide needed additional protections for victims of workplace violence and help protect others in the work space as well.

For these reasons, UMMS urges a favorable vote on SB 105.

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