



MedStar Health

**SB 298 – Criminal Law – Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member**

**Testimony by Larry Smith in *Support***

February 8, 2022

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**Bill Summary**

SB 298 makes it illegal for a person to make or send a threat to a health official or hospital staff member. Anyone in violation is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not to exceed 90 days or a fine not to exceed \$500 or both.

**MedStar Health's Position**

My name is Larry Smith, and I am Vice President of Risk Management Services at MedStar Health and Chair of MedStar's Associate Safety Committee.

Of the issues involved in ensuring the wellbeing and safety of our associates, workplace violence against members of our staff is one of our greatest challenges. Despite our efforts to combat this serious problem, the number of violent incidences increase each year, as does the seriousness of the physical and psychological harm experienced by our staff.

This is not just a healthcare issue it is a public health issue. At a time when we have a nationwide shortage of physicians and nurses, workplace violence is causing experienced and talented healthcare professionals to be lost from the workplace.

- Some because of injury. Those requiring time off from work to recuperate from workplace violence were four times more frequent in healthcare than in other industries, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).
- Some healthcare associates are lost for good, as workplace violence is associated directly with higher incidence of burnout, and some who experience workplace violence decide that the risk is too great and leave their position to find work in a safer environment.

MedStar Health believes strongly that violence in the workplace is not “part of the job”. Our associates deserve the right to know that they will be going home safely to their family after they complete their shift. MedStar has taken a number of steps aimed at trying to prevent workplace violence in our workplace.

In 2017, MedStar Health established a Workplace Violence Prevention Committee, and since that time has:

- Developed a zero-tolerance policy for workplace violence;
- Developed and implemented a systemwide electronic system for reporting incidences of workplace violence;
- Provided personal wearable safety alarms
- Provided de-escalation and defensive physical skills training to over 2,400 associates working in three high-risk areas (security, behavioral health, and emergency medicine);
- Implemented an mandatory annual training module for all 30,000 associates focused on understanding workplace violence and what every associate needs to know to help ensure their safety and the safety of others;
- Provided de-escalation training for over 8,000 associates whose responsibilities place them in a position of dealing directly with patients, visitors, and other members of the community;
- Produced and distributed a training video regarding the response to an active shooter/armed assailant situation.

Despite these efforts, more is needed. Although these efforts at prevention are vitally important, what also is needed is evidence to our healthcare heroes that we are ready to respond appropriately when these events occur.

MedStar Health supports the intent of SB 298, however, since threats can occur against hospital staff who are not providing personal care or medical treatment to patients, **we recommend broadening the definition to include any individual employed by the hospital.** Expanding the definition will ensure all hospital employees are protected regardless of their job title or duties.

For the reasons above, we ask that you give SB 298 a ***favorable*** report.