



Maryland State Council
Safe Practice Safe Care

To: Maryland Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee 2021
Miller Senate Office Building
Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

From: Maryland State Council of the Emergency Nurses Association

Date: February 8, 2022

Re: **SB 298 Criminal Law-Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member**
Oral and written testimony
Maryland Emergency Nurses Association requests a FAVORABLE vote

Good day Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldestreicher, and Committee members,

My name is Lisa Tenney and I am testifying on behalf of The Maryland Emergency Nurses Association in favor of SB 298 Criminal Law-**Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member**.

We thank Senators Young, Benson, Feldman, and Lam for sponsoring this bill.

You may recall that ENA has testified before this committee in previous years about the increasing verbal threats and physical violence against healthcare workers, and especially towards those of us who work in Maryland's Emergency Rooms (ER). Violence and threats have increased during the current Covid 19 pandemic. ⁽¹⁾ It has occurred in ERs, hospitals, urgent care centers, and other healthcare settings. This is the reason Maryland ENA would support an amendment to this bill that would include all health care settings.

The past two years of the pandemic have been brutal on emergency staff. We are mentally and physically exhausted. Yet, we feel bad that our patients are experiencing very long waits to see the ER Doctor, be admitted to a hospital bed, or transferred to a psychiatric inpatient bed. Patients suffer from these waits, and not being able to have a family member with them worsens their frustration and anger. They lash out at us.

Healthcare workers are accustomed to people getting cranky and fussing at us. They usually just want to speak to the person in charge. Under the 2019 Maryland Patient Bill of Rights, Patients have the RIGHT to complain, and **"File a complaint about care and have the complaint reviewed without the complaint affecting the patient's care.** ⁽²⁾ As part of every hospital's mandated Patient Safety Program, patients and family members are encouraged to **SPEAK UP** if they have a concern or question. ⁽³⁾ Hospital staff are trained to provide patients with

information on how to file a complaint with administrators, the Maryland Office of Health Care Quality, the State Boards, The Joint Commission, and CMS. This promotes safety, transparency, and trust.

This bill is not about people who complain. It is about people who threaten us with harm with harm and interfere with our ability to take care of patients. NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) defines workplace violence as “violent acts (including physical assaults and **threats of assaults**) directed toward persons at work or on duty.” (4)

SB 298 would have helped a doctor I know who worked an 18-day stretch in the COVID ICU because his fellow physicians were sick or exposure isolated. The adult son of one of his dying end-stage Covid patients who had multiple pre-existing conditions, repeatedly made threats of harm against this doctor. Police were summoned. The son was escorted off of hospital property. But that was all that could be done, even though the son repeatedly threatened to find this doctor and make her suffer the way his dad was suffering.” After 18 days of not being home or seeing her family, this psychological burden made her terrified to walk to her car.

Thank you. Your favorable vote will add another tool in the Maryland Healthcare worker workplace violence toolbox.

Sincerely,

Lisa Tenney

Lisa Tenney, BSN, RN, CEN, CPHRM, FAEN
Chair, Government Affairs Committee
Maryland State Council Emergency Nurses Association
lctenney@gmail.com

References

- (1) Udoji, Mercy. (2020) When an epidemic of violence against health care workers meets a pandemic. Kevinmd.com.
<https://www.kevinmd.com/blog/2020/09/when-an-epidemic-against-health-care-workers-meets-a-pandemic.html>
- (2) Hogan, Lawrence. (2019) Hospitals-Patient’s Bill of Rights. COMAR, Chapter 285.
https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2019RS/Chapters_noln/CH_285_hb0145e.pdf
- (3) The Joint Commission. (2019) Speak Up Campaigns. Speak Up About Your Care.
<https://www.jointcommission.org/resources/for-consumers/speak-up-campaigns>
- (4) CDC-NIOSHS. (2002) Violence Occupational Hazards in Hospitals.
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2002-101/>