

February 9, 2022

Chairman Patton and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. I have been an emergency room nurse for almost 15 years and a forensic nurse for 11 years. Throughout my time in the medical field I have witnessed numerous co-workers that have been assaulted. No one starts their career in healthcare thinking this is what is going to happen. I have watched unprovoked patients lunge out at staff members. Most staff members do not report to the police because "it isn't worth the hassle". On May 2, 2019 I was that staff member. I was sitting with an aggressive patient because the technician who had been sitting with her was so distraught from the things she was saying to him and about him. I told him to take a break and see if he could switch out with someone else. While I was sitting there she lunged at me multiple times. I was able to block her and told her that her behavior wasn't going to be tolerated. As other staff members entered the room she attacked me. I was distracted by them entering and did not have my eyes on her. She was able to punch me in the face so hard it broke my glasses into pieces. I was so shook by what had happened it took me a second to realize what took place. Because of staffing, I had to finish the last four hours of my shift with no glasses and after this trauma. After this I was off work for almost 3 months. I had suffered a concussion that would not allow me to go back to such a high pace of work and being on the computer for any length of time. During this time was when the deep depression set in. For three months I laid in my room in the dark, not able to watch TV, be on my phone or computer and sitting up hurt. To this day, almost three years later I still suffer from debilitating migraines. As I was able to go back to work I learned that the DA had dropped my charges against this patient. I felt let down and angry. How was a healthcare worker supposed to go to work and feel safe when even if they did file a report, the DA is not going to support us. There was no point for me to move forward with anything when I wasn't being supported by the law.

As society has been stressed with the ongoing pandemic the violence has increased. Friends of mine and former co-workers have been thrown around the room and even sexually assaulted by patients. We have been conditioned to think that this is just a part of the job. We go into healthcare to help people and we leave a battered and torn shell of ourselves because of the years of abuse we have been enduring. Not only does this abuse harm us physically, but mentally we are not able to do our jobs any longer the way we have been able to in the past. This experience made me want to leave bedside nursing. After I obtained my master's degree I decided to leave bedside and move into an office role. As I look around at the nursing staff I currently work with in the emergency department and wonder how they are doing this. Not only how do they continue to come to work every day, but why? Why do they continue to come to a job where they are exposed to not only risks of the now pandemic, but also at risk for being physically harmed. I know it is the same reason I went to work every day. I loved my job. I loved my co-workers. When you work in an area like this for any length of time, your co-workers become your family. I do not want to continue to watch my family being abused any longer. We need to take a stand and say it is no longer okay to harm a healthcare worker and we will not be standing by any longer to take the abuse.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak. We appreciate your work on such important legislation to help protect our healthcare workers. If you have any questions about this you can contact me, Sarah Evans-Simpson, at 316-708-1658.

Respectfully,

Sarah Evans-Simpson, MSN-FN, RN,TCRN