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February 2, 2022

Oregon Emergency Physicians (OEP) staffs three Portland area hospitals, including our State's busiest Emergency Department at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. We are writing in support of HB 4142, which makes it a felony to assault hospital staff.

Emergency Department nurses, physicians and staff are assaulted every day in Oregon. These events have become commonplace during the pandemic, and they are causing devoted clinicians to leave the medical profession. It is time for the Legislature to say enough is enough.

The language of this Bill makes it clear that in order to be prosecuted, a patient must "intentionally, knowingly or recklessly" commit the assault. Our Emergency Department team cares for patients in crisis every day. We are not interested in sanctioning patients who are suffering from dementia or people experiencing a mental health crisis. The unfortunate reality is that hospital workers are assaulted every day by patients who are in full possession of their mental faculties.

As physicians, we want to provide compassionate care to every member of our community, without fear of personal harm. We have both an ethical and legal obligation under Federal law to treat anyone who seeks care in the Emergency Department, even if they have assaulted staff during previous visits. We routinely treat patients that have previously hit us, kicked us, clawed and scratched us, and spit on us. This kind of behavior would not be tolerated at any other workplace in the State, but here on the front lines of the pandemic, we endure it every day. And it's getting worse.

Physicians and nurses are leaving their chosen professions in droves. In many cases, the stress of the pandemic brings clinicians to the brink, and a physical assault pushes them over the edge. Many states have stand alone laws that specifically prevent assault against healthcare workers. This bill is more limited. It is a simple, clear revision of the assault statute.

We urge you to pass HB 4142. Please support healthcare workers with your unequivocal statement that intentionally, knowingly or recklessly assaulting a healthcare worker is never acceptable!

Oregon Emergency Physicians

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