

February 12, 2024

The Honorable Jason Kropf, Chair
House Judiciary Committee

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RE: Support for HB 4088 with the -2 amendments

Representative Kropf, Members of the Committee:

Salem Health is a nonprofit health system serving the mid-Willamette Valley. We provide primary, specialty, urgent, and acute care at locations from Woodburn to Salem to Dallas. Our mission is to improve the health of the people and communities we serve. That mission spans all operations of Salem Health, from primary care clinics to our busy emergency departments and hospitals. It is carried out by our highly skilled and compassionate staff. They provide quality care to the communities we serve with courage and empathy.

Reports of escalating violence against health care workers across the country have heightened public awareness of the growing risk to health care workers. But this isn't a new trend. We've been focused on preventing and addressing harmful words and actions for several years at Salem Health. Patient and staff safety is always a top priority.

According to the American Nurses Association, health care workers are *four* times more likely to be exposed to workplace violence than other professions. A 2022 National Nurses United survey of 2,500 U.S. nurses found that 48% experienced an increase in workplace violence between 2021 and 2022. That's up from a 30.6% increase the prior year.

Salem Health has taken a rigorous approach to this problem. For too long, health care workers believed that violent words or actions were "just part of the job." We've embarked on a culture change that includes changing expectations.

Our approach empowers staff to act immediately when they are confronted with harmful words and actions. We have a robust reporting system that allows us to better understand the circumstances under which harmful words and actions occur, and to develop individualized response plans for each specific incident and patient.

In addition, we've hired outside security consultants to take a fresh look at our safety infrastructure and make recommendations based on their evaluations, staff input, and best practices. Acting on

their findings, we've installed weapons detection systems and/or security screenings at public entrances to all Salem Health hospital and clinic locations. We've provided ballistics vests for our employed security staff and increased our camera coverage and monitoring. We've conducted a system-wide, in-person training around responding to an active shooter. Additional training is available for staff, both online and in-person.


These culture and infrastructure changes complement a new methodology for data collection that is designed to give our organization a true picture of harmful words and actions within our organization. Last year, we saw an average of 142 assaults per month. Registered Nurses, CNAs, and our security officers are at the greatest risk for assault.

We continue to see measurable increases in physical assaults against our care team members. Fully 67% of all harms to staff come from our patients. We've documented that 30% of physical assaults in our organization happen in the emergency department.

These findings are sobering. They underscore the importance of the changes we've made and substantiate the need for increasing the penalty for violence against health care workers.

We deeply appreciate the hard work that has gone into crafting a HB 4088 and support the bill with the -2 amendments.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Nester Wolfe, RN MSN NEA-BC
President and CEO