



Oregon Chapter
American College of
Emergency Physicians



**OREGON
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION**

March 20, 2025

To: Sen. Deb Patterson Chair
Sen. Cedric Hayden, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Health Care Committee

From: Dr. Patsy Chenpanas, President-Elect OR-ACEP

RE: SB 537 Violence in the Workplace

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Patsy Chenpanas and I'm here on behalf of the Oregon Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians and the Oregon Medical Association in support of SB 537, which creates new violence prevention requirements to protect workers against assault.

We have worked on preventing assaults against healthcare providers with the Oregon Emergency Nurses Association, the Oregon Nurses Association and the Oregon Medical Association and other stakeholders for multiple sessions. Your action is needed now to protect healthcare workers, who are leaving the medical field in large numbers as they are not protected at their workplaces, leaving us even more short-staffed than ever before. Assaults on healthcare workers have escalated during the pandemic and have reached a crisis point. You've seen the recent headlines from Pennsylvania, of the recent deadly hostage situation and shooting in the ICU, and from our own state, of the deadly shooting of one of the security guards at Legacy.

A colleague of mine asked me to share her experience of being assaulted in the ED: "I was walking down the hall to update one of my patients. A patient came out of their room, looked around, and her eyes landed on me. She came up to me, with her hand already in the air. At that moment, I knew I was going to get hit. She then punched me in the face, slammed my head against the wall, and then kicked me in the knee. I will never, ever forget this experience – one of our nurses screamed, "No!" ran down the hall to help me, and multiple other nurses came to help wrestle the person off of me.

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Despite being injured myself, I wondered whether the patient who had just assaulted me was okay. I later found out that this was her third time assaulting a HCW, and it appeared she made a choice to assault me, as she was not undergoing a mental health crisis. The next day, I had to return to work, and as soon as I saw the hospital, I began having a panic attack. This happened multiple days in a row, and I ended up having to go to therapy afterwards for PTSD from being assaulted. Even now, when I am approached by someone from the side or behind in the emergency department, I startle and jump easily due to this horrible experience.”

Emergency departments should be a safe space where patients are guaranteed they have the full attention and dedication of their care team to treat their ailments.

I have had my own patients leave the Emergency Department, while in the middle of receiving care, because they have witnessed violence against healthcare workers. Just recently, a situation occurred that was utterly terrifying to me and a patient I was caring for, who could not leave while receiving care. She was admitted for a surgical issue and was boarding (or, waiting for a room due to hospital overcrowding) in a hallway bed next to the entrance. She was connected to IV fluids, connected to monitors, and receiving IV antibiotics. While we were discussing her treatment, a man walked past us in the narrow hallway, loudly threatening violence as he was being discharged.

There was nowhere either myself or my sick patient could move to quickly, to avoid a violent confrontation. I cannot begin to describe the helplessness, the feeling of true fear, nor the absolute look of terror on my patient’s face, when imminent violence against us as innocent bystanders became a very real possibility. The man did assault one of our ED staff, after he passed by her gurney, and that staff member had to check in to the ED for care minutes later. Patients should not have to worry that their own personal safety might be compromised while they are already sick and receiving emergency medical care, nor should healthcare workers have to fear that they have to choose between suffering bodily harm while serving others, as we are called to do. Keeping healthcare workers safe keeps ALL Oregonians safe.

Oregon’s healthcare workers regularly face violence in ways few other professions do. We urge the passage of SB 537 as one of the ways to tell our dedicated, brave healthcare workers we appreciate your dedication and will do everything possible, so you don’t worry about getting home safely to see your family again.

Thank you for your consideration.

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