



# Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: March 21, 2025

TO: Senator Deb Patterson, Chair; Senator Cedric Hayden, Vice-Chair;  
and Members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare

FROM: Julie Scholz, MBA, Executive Director  
On behalf of the Oregon Pediatric Society

SUBJECT: Support for SB 537, Preventing Violence in Healthcare Settings

The membership of the Oregon Pediatric Society (OPS), the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, is comprised of pediatricians, nurse practitioners, physician associates, pediatric medical residents and medical students across Oregon. Many of them work in hospital units or emergency departments. On behalf of these members and their work colleagues—including 2023 murdered Legacy Health hospital security guard Bobby Smallwood—OPS supports Senate Bill 537. This legislation addresses the epidemic of violence against healthcare workers. We have no time to waste in getting improvements started.

Verbal threats and being physically attacked by visitors and family members are typical occurrences multiple times a week for hospital, home health, and hospice nurses and clinicians.

SB 537 focuses on strengthening healthcare systems' safety protocols, holding them accountable for their parts in preventing violence against their employees, and increases transparency through improved reporting.

An OPS member pediatric critical care physician shares her experiences and the impact on healthcare worker morale and mental health:

“Healthcare is a calling, but for those who provide it, the risk to their personal safety simply isn’t worth it anymore. Skilled and passionate people are leaving the pediatric healthcare workforce, and fewer are entering it. I recently bore witness to an episode of violence in my hospital unit that led to severe harm. As I checked in with my staff, I heard the same thing over and over: *I’m surprised it didn’t happen sooner; something like this felt inevitable*. The reality is, feeling afraid, verbally threatened, and even hit at work has become a normal part of a hospital healthcare provider’s job. That is abnormal and unacceptable.”

In order to understand the problem, we need good data and to ensure the voices of frontline healthcare workers are heard. This bill mandates the collection of improved reporting so that the State and the sector can understand the breadth of this issue and develop further measures to protect the protectors. Medical providers don’t want just



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another mandated online training module. Safety changes and supports need to be meaningful to them, or they will leave their jobs. **A diminished healthcare workforce impacts us all.**

Senate Bill 537 isn't perfect. We need the buy-in, support, and resources of the hospital system employers. We need to protect patients that are in mental health crises, and ensure that discrimination doesn't happen based on differences in cultural expression and perceptions. This bill allows medical record notation that flags patients deemed a danger to others, while stating that these individuals cannot be denied any medical care or entry based on that alone. We suggest that Safety Committees develop guidance for reviewing individuals' flags and would like to see more clarity in the bill or Rulemaking about when can security personnel remove threatening or violent patients or family members from premises. But SB 537 is a strong foundation for addressing something that can't wait for perfect. Versions of this legislative concept have been discussed with many interested parties over the years, including hospital representatives, disability and family advocates, and people working in healthcare professions. This bill continues to honor patient rights; we'd like the rights of those in the healthcare workforce to be equally valued.

OPS' hope is that this bill leads to deeper and equitable conversations and protocols between healthcare workers and their employers about how to reduce violence in healthcare settings **before more healthcare employees and patients get hurt.** Other than professional fighters, what other workforce is expected to be physically punched as part of their job? It's especially tragic that this happens to care providers giving healing and human services.

The Oregon Pediatric Society asks you to support SB 537 so that together we may build long overdue processes for protecting healthcare workers. Thank you for your consideration.