Maryland
Hospital Association

Senate Bill 298 - Criminal Law - Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member

Position: *Support*
February 8, 2022
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

MHA Position
On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 298.

Maryland is facing a staggering health care workforce crisis with more than 3,900 nursing vacancies in hospitals statewide—a 50% increase since August 2021. At the same time, our remaining staff, after 700 days on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, also sadly are facing a rise in workplace violence.

Rates of nonfatal workplace violence against health care workers spiked since 2011—accounting for 73% of all nonfatal violent injuries and illnesses in 2018.[1] Violence in the workplace takes a toll and leads to higher staff turnover, absenteeism, deterioration of employee morale, and burnout.[2]

MHA supports the intent of SB 298, however, since threats can occur against hospital staff who are not providing personal care or medical treatment to patients, **we recommend broadening this definition to include any individual employed by the hospital.** Expanding this definition will help ensure all employees are protected regardless of their job title and duties.

Hospitals' top priority is the safety of their patients, staff, and visitors. Hospitals proactively improve safety, including making investments in duress buttons to allow staff to quickly call for help and forming de-escalation teams led by social workers, rather than security personnel.

Despite these efforts, health care workers continue to share stories of being kicked, bitten, spit at, and threatened. Hospitals should be safe places of health, hope, and healing where staff can focus on delivering care and supporting the needs of patients and their families. SB 298 offers a tool to support and retain our hospital heroes and encourage those considering careers in health care.

For more information, please contact:
Jane Krienke, Legislative Analyst, Government Affairs
Jkrienke@mhaonline.org

[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (April, 2020). "Fact Sheet: Workplace Violence in Healthcare, 2018".
[2] Cost of Community Violence to Hospitals and Health Systems: Report for the American Hospital Association. (July 26, 2017). Cost of Community Violence to Hospitals and Health Systems.