Illinois Health and Hospital Association

The Honorable Eric Sorenson
U.S. House of Representatives
1205 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Representative Sorenson:

On behalf of the Illinois Health and Hospital Association's (IHA's) over 200 members, we respectfully request your support of the Safety from Violence for Healthcare Employees (SAVE) Act of 2023 (H.R. 2584), which would provide important federal protections similar to those that exist for flight crews, flight attendants and airport workers. This bipartisan legislation is critical, as no federal law specifically protects
health care employees from workplace assault or intimidation.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare workers are now five times more likely to suffer a workplace violence injury than any other sector, making professions devoted to healing and recovery some of the most dangerous in the country. A 2023 survey conducted by Premier found that 40% of healthcare workers
have experienced an act of workplace violence in the last two years.

In addition to the harm inflicted directly on healthcare workers, these incidents also affect patient care by tying up resources, delaying urgently needed care and increasing the potential for adverse medical events. Violent incidents also exacerbate staff absenteeism, turnover, and negatively affect overall mental wellness in the workforce. These impacts are accelerating at a time when healthcare facilities already are experiencing chronic staffing shortages since the COVID-19 pandemic.

National hospital requirements to prevent, monitor and report workplace violence published by The Joint Commission in 2022 have helped support our members' violence prevention efforts. In addition, our hospitals are working with the American Hospital Association's Hospitals Against Violence initiative to demonstrate support for communities and victims of violence, while also collaborating on best practices in workplace violence prevention. However, the lack of protections in federal law creates a gap in combatting and preventing incidences of workplace violence against healthcare personnel, which is why we urge you to support the SAVE Act.

Modeled after the federal statute protecting aircraft and airport workers, the legislation would establish as a federal crime assaulting or intimidating a hospital employee in a way that interferes with the ability of that employee to perform their duties. In addition, enhanced penalties would apply to acts that involve dangerous weapons, result in physical injuries, or are committed during an emergency declaration. At the same time,
the change in law would also include essential protections for vulnerable populations by providing a defense to prosecution if the individual has a physical, mental, or intellectual disability and "the conduct of the defendant was a clear and direct manifestation of such disability."

Furthermore, the creation of a new grant program through the Department of Justice would provide critical resources to target and reduce the incidence of violence at hospitals. These resources would help hospitals provide training for workers to prevent violence and de-escalate crisis situations, strengthen coordination with state and local law enforcement, and invest in healthcare facility improvements that can enhance staff, patient and visitor safety.

Hospitals are the first place that communities turn to in times of disaster to treat patients, save lives and seek out support. Targeted federal protection combined with investment that supports our members' efforts to keep their employees safe would substantially help safeguard hospitals' status as places of healing and hope. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Koehler
Vice President, Government Relations

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