

September 10, 2012

Chairman Baker:

It is my privilege to submit my testimony in an effort to make hospitals in the State of Pennsylvania safer places to work. I have been a Registered Nurse since 1998 working in various areas of specialty.

For the past twelve years I have been employed by a hospital in Delaware County. I am currently working on the Child/ Adolescent Psychiatric Unit.

The nature of working with psychiatric adolescent patients is high risk for all involved in their treatment. There is a need for educated, experienced trained professionals to be able to identify potentially escalating situations and prevent violence to staff and patients alike. Since arriving to the unit over three years ago there have been many changes. Educated, trained professionals have been replaced with less educated, minimally trained employees. Staffing ratios have been lowered and incidences of pulled unfamiliar staff have drastically increased. Security is scant and must be called in an emergency wasting valuable time. Safety has taken a back seat in an effort to increase revenue.

There have been numerous injuries to staff and multiple letters have been written to our administrators which have fallen on deaf ears. Many of our staff members have had loss of time due to injuries inflicted by our patient population.

One worker was punched repeatedly in the head and face by a patient with a history of violence toward staff. I have witnessed a doctor getting hit over the head with a telephone by a patient. One of our workers could not return to work due to a knee injury accrued by a patient attack. A 60 year old RN was kicked in the ribs. Recently, I was threatened by a patient with a history of violence and had to have the police come on to the unit to remedy the situation.

These are just a few of many incidents that have occurred and continue to occur. We work in fear daily for ourselves and our patients.

It is interesting to note how I was recruited to submit my testimony regarding unsafe working conditions in hospitals and the need for laws to protect us. Let me premise this by noting that I have a squeaky clean record and have never needed redirection, had a poor review, or been written up by my superiors for unprofessional behaviors.

Recently I filled out unsafe staffing forms to bring to light the need to address these crucial issues and have received my first write up for unprofessional behavior. It is my belief that this was done in an effort to subdue my quest for a safe environment for my patients and safe working conditions.

I am extremely excited about this bill and its potential to save healthcare professionals from permanent injury and or death.

Respectfully,

Valerie Whitcomb, RN