

To: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Katheryne Hay BSN, RN, CEN

Date: February 10, 2022

RE: House Bill 2620 – Proponent Testimony

Chairman Patton and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2620. I provide this testimony on my own behalf and am not here representing my employer.

My name is Katheryne Hay and I have worked in emergency healthcare for the past 15 years in various positions--from a secretary all the way to a registered nurse. Throughout my time in the ER, I have personally been physically and verbally assaulted almost daily. This is not an uncommon phenomenon in healthcare; nurses have been viewed as punching bags by patients and family members for years. I have been told that I "have to do what I (the patient) say because you're the nurse", "this is what you signed up for", to name a few. I have been hit, kicked, screamed at, bitten, strangled, pushed, and spit on. I have been called a cunt, an "oral sex having bitch", a faggot, a N**, and a "loser with uneven eyebrows", just to name a few. I have had numerous patients/visitors threaten to blow up the hospital, to follow me to my car and rape me, and have my job taken away.

I had a patient when I was a newer nurse that grabbed my radio cord and wrapped it around my neck just because he "felt like it". Luckily, a quick thinking tech cut the cord and was able to subdue the patient with other staff allowing me to get to safety. I was not given any time off without having to use my own PTO and was expected to come back to work immediately because "you'll get used to this happening, just brush it off". This patient was never held accountable for his actions and I have taken care of and seen him many times since that day.

Most police departments will not press charges on patients or visitors and will actively try to talk healthcare workers out of pressing charges by scaring them about going to court. We are blessed at the University of Kansas Health System to have our own police department that supports staff and believes in holding people accountable for their actions.

Most recently, I had a patient turn around and choke me while I was pushing her in the wheelchair and then grabbed my charge nurse's scissors and attempted to stab him. Our police responded immediately and the patient was given a medical screening exam by our physician and cleared to go to jail. I have had patients try to finagle their way into staff touching their genitals for their personal enjoyment under the guise of needing medical treatment. I have had patients masturbate in front of me with sexual intent and tell me to "suck my dick" or "do you want to see how big it is?".

These statements may be graphic and make some uncomfortable to read but this is the reality of what we have to deal with every single day. Assaulting and battering medical staff should be a felony. Period. We are here to help people and make them well. The joy of our profession has been stamped out and crushed by the constant berating, battering, and belittling of our staff. We have learned to grow thick skin and shrug off the assaults. This is leading to the burnout of the healthcare workers thus having experience nurses leaving the bedside in droves to safer and gentler surroundings. These awful offenses are currently misdemeanors and allow for the quick release of these individuals with only a slap on the wrist. There needs to be a harsher punishment otherwise this will continue and the nurses that haven't left the bedside already, will.

Katheryne Hay BSN, RN, CEN