



January 12, 2024

The Honorable Chris Holden
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O St., Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 977 (Rodriguez) – Support

Dear Assembly Member Holden:

Health care workers in hospitals across California are increasingly subject to violent threats and attacks. California's health care workers must be better protected while they care for others and save lives.

For these reasons, the California Hospital Association, on behalf of more than 400 hospitals and health systems, supports Assembly Bill 977, which would extend the penalties for violence committed against first responders to include all health care workers who provide services within emergency departments.

Under current law, violence against health care workers inside an emergency department is penalized differently depending on the category of health care worker and the location of the attack. AB 977 is an important step toward providing health care workers with the same protections whether they are inside a hospital emergency department or elsewhere.

The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that [health care workers are five times more likely to experience workplace violence than employees in other sectors](#). In fact, [a 2021 study](#) found that 44% of nurses reported being subject to physical violence, while 68% reported verbal abuse — troubling numbers that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A [2022 study](#) of one hospital emergency department supported these findings, demonstrating that incidences of workplace violence increased during the pandemic and were directly associated with the COVID-19 case rate.

Hospital health care workers perform their duties in a high-risk environment, as many patients and visitors experience high stress when suffering an emergency medical condition that can at times lead to aggressive behavior. Importantly, health care workers are trained and understand when a patient's behavior is related to their physical or mental health condition versus when a patient or visitor is being unnecessarily violent.

Hospitals and health systems make significant investments in infrastructure, staff, and training to keep workers, patients, and visitors safe, including:

- Development and implementation of comprehensive workplace violence prevention plans
- Regular reporting of incidents of violence to CalOSHA
- Designing facilities and workflows that increase safety, such as installation of metal detectors, use of additional security personnel, and enhanced weapon detection protocols

Hospitals are doing their part to protect their employees — the most critical component of our health care delivery system — but California’s penal code has fallen behind. AB 977 will deliver important safeguards for all workers in hospital emergency departments to better protect them from violence. Because California’s penal code already provides increased penalties for various professions, we do not anticipate a significant fiscal impact to the state with the inclusions of health care workers who provide services within emergency departments.

Finally, this penalty extension should apply to workers throughout the *entire* hospital building — health care workers in emergency departments are not the only ones experiencing increased rates of violence. Health care workers should be protected from violence *regardless of where they work in a hospital*.

Health care employees deserve a safe workplace and CHA respectfully requests your “AYE” vote on AB 977.

Sincerely,



Vanessa Gonzalez,
Vice President, State Advocacy

cc: The Honorable Freddie Rodriguez
The Honorable Members of the Assembly Appropriations Committee
Annika Carlson, Consultant, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Gary Olson, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus