



May 09, 2024

The Honorable Aisha Wahab  
Chair, Senate Public Safety Committee  
1020 N St., Room 545  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 977 (Rodriguez) – COSPONSOR**

Dear Senator Wahab:

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 (CHA), on behalf of more than 400 hospitals and health systems, is proud to cosponsor Assembly Bill (AB) 977 (Rodriguez, D-Chino), which would extend the penalties for violence committed against first responders to include all health care workers who provide services within an emergency department (ED).**

Under current law, violence against health care workers inside an ED 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 to recognize when a patient's behavior is related to their physical or mental health condition, versus when a patient or visitor is just being 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.

Health care employees deserve a safe workplace, regardless of whether that is inside or outside a hospital emergency department. For these reasons, 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 Senate Public Safety Committee  
Stella Choe, Counsel, Senate Public Safety Committee  
Eric Csizmar, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus