



June 11, 2024

The Honorable Anna Caballero
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
1021 O St., Room 412
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 977 (Rodriguez) – COSPONSOR

Dear Senator Caballero:

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 certain 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 ED 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 ED supported these findings, demonstrating that incidences of workplace violence increased during the pandemic.

Health care workers are trained to recognize whether a patient's behavior is related to their physical or mental health condition, and they report that the majority of violence they experience is from patients or visitors who are aware of their actions, rather than those with behavioral health diagnoses.

The Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) reports over 2 million visits in 2021 to hospital EDs by individuals with a behavioral health diagnosis. Every hospital has well-established behavioral health protocols and enhanced safeguards to ensure the safety of both patients in crisis and the staff caring for them.

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 protections for all workers in hospital EDs to better shield them from violence. Because California’s penal code already provides increased penalties for various professions, the fiscal impact to the state with the inclusions of health care workers who provide services within EDs would be minimal.

Health care employees deserve a safe workplace, regardless of whether that is inside or outside a hospital ED. 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 Appropriations Committee
Liah Burnley, Counsel, Senate Appropriations Committee
Eric Csizmar, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus