



To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

From: Coalition of Wisconsin Health Care Organizations

Re: Support of AB 960 – Battery and Threats of Violence to Health Care Providers and Staff

Date: February 9, 2022

Over the last decade, threats of violence and acts of violence against health care workers continues to rise at a concerning rate. Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that nonfatal workplace injuries resulting from violence disproportionately impact people working in health care settings. In 2018, 73% of all nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in the United States occurred to staff working in health care related jobs. And the number of nonfatal workplace violence injuries has grown from a rate of 6.4 injuries per 10,000 full-time workers in 2011 to 10.4 injuries per 10,000 full-time workers in 2018, a rate five times higher than workers overall.¹

A study by Milliman for the American Hospital Association found that hospitals spent approximately \$1.5 billion in 2016 on prevention, preparedness, and post-incident costs for violence within hospitals. While health care organizations have substantially increased efforts to protect their staff from acts of violence, more needs to be done to deter violent behavior by patients and others.

The effects of these actions by a select few impacts the availability of health care to the rest of our state. Health care providers are burned out and growing threats of violence in the workplace are forcing them to make difficult career decisions to protect themselves and their families. In the

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/foi/workplace-violence-healthcare-2018.htm>

first five months following the fall 2020 surge in COVID cases, health care workers “quit rate” increased by 30%. Data from national organizations representing critical care nurses shows that two out of every three critical care nurses have considered leaving their jobs due to their experience over the last two years. Each threat experienced or witnessed takes an emotional toll on clinicians.

In a recent interview with the Wisconsin State Journal, Dr. Chris Eberlein, an emergency medicine physician at Gundersen Health System, spoke to the very real dilemma facing health care providers today. “It’s a difficult job at base line. You do it ... to take care of your community and to help others,” Eberlein said. “When you’ve got people that are acting that way, either verbally or physically assaulting you, it really will make people question whether this is the right thing for them.”²

“The stress, pressure, and violence the health care profession has endured over the past two years is unprecedented and has contributed to higher attrition rates among nurses and hospital staff when we can least afford to lose them,” said Majority Leader LeMahieu, Speaker Vos, Senator Wanggaard and Representative Magnafici as they circulated this legislation. We strongly agree regarding the need to protect health care providers and staff from threats and acts of violence.

We respectfully ask for your support of Assembly Bill 960.

² Wahlberg, D. (2022, February 5) Wisconsin bill would make violent threats against health care workers a felony. *Wisconsin State Journal*. https://madison.com/news/local/health-med-fit/wisconsin-bill-would-make-violent-threats-against-health-care-workers-a-felony/article_c59dcd15-8f3d-522a-bdef-b8f2bd0d2dd1.html