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

**FROM: Ann Zenk, RN BSN MHA, Vice President Workforce and Clinical Practice**

**DATE: February 9, 2022**

**RE: WHA Supports Assembly Bill 960 to Protect the Health Care Frontline**

On behalf of our 140 hospital members and the more than 100,000 employees working in our state's hospitals, the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) supports Assembly Bill 960 and the goal of protecting health care providers and staff from threats and acts of violence. Over the past decade, threats and violence against those working in health care have continued to rise. Increasing threats to our health care worker's safety, increased burnout, and increasing workforce shortages make it imperative to provide every strategy possible to turn the tide, including the important and appreciated prevention strategy the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety is considering in AB 960.

Health care leaders and health care teams continue to provide support, education and action to not just de-escalate high risk situations, hospitals and their workforce are now focusing on "pre-escalation", understanding that the best-case scenario is heading off the threat of violence before it occurs. AB 960 has the potential to provide another pre-escalation strategy for hospitals, health care teams and law enforcement to prevent physical violence.

AB 960 will create an opportunity to not just react to violence after it occurs, but to act on threats against those providing essential health services to their communities before physical harm occurs. This legislation will send an important signal to the health care workforce and those who may contemplate threatening this workforce: it's not part of your job to receive and tolerate threats of physical harm. This legislation also provides law enforcement with a clear option to take when serious threats of violence are reported and will help encourage reporting of serious threats when all else fails.

Realizing the goal of preventing threats of physical violence through this legislation is important to protecting the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of our health care workforce. Unlike the sudden and horrifying impact actual physical violence has, threats and intimidation take a more insidious toll on healthcare clinicians and support staff. The cumulative impact of continuing to bounce back from scary and hurtful statements made by individuals they care for, and will continue to care for, is a source of stress and burnout that saps the energy, joy and motivation from caregivers.

Hospital and health system leaders have witnessed the resilience of a workforce that provides compassionate care in the face of great challenge, including threats of violence. These health care heroes pull on a reserve of empathy that seems bottomless, but is not, and should not be strained with unacceptable threats and actions.

Wisconsin citizens deserve and expect high quality health care and rely on our highly-skilled and exceptional health care workforce. Threats of violence against health care workers pose a risk to individual safety that cannot be tolerated, and a risk to keeping and recruiting clinicians, technicians and support staff to health care teams.

WHA and our members ask for your support of Assembly Bill 960 to help protect frontline health care workers from battery and threats of violence.