

Memo

To: Members, House Government Operations Committee
From: Adam Carlson, Vice President, Advocacy
Date: Jun. 13, 2023
Re: House Bills (HB) 4520 & 4521
Position: Support

The Michigan Health & Hospital Association (MHA) supports HBs 4520 and 4521, which enhance penalties for assaulting healthcare providers performing job-related duties. These enhanced fines are an important step toward creating a safe environment for our direct care workforce.

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, workers in healthcare experience violence-related injuries in the workplace more than four times the rate of other jobs in the private sector. In a study by the Emergency Nurses Association, 54% of emergency room nurses nationally had experienced physical or verbal abuse within the past two weeks.

Healthcare employees and volunteers entered these professions with the primary purpose of helping others, but increasingly, violence is becoming an unfortunate and unavoidable part of providing healthcare. These violent events and their lasting impact have detrimental consequences on healthcare professionals and on Michigan hospitals' ability to properly staff clinical units, especially in rural areas where healthcare professionals are in high demand.

It's currently a felony to assault police officers, firefighters, paramedics and other first responders. Previous legislatures have recognized these professions are inherently dangerous, and professionals on duty in those fields have an obligation to run toward danger, not away from it. Healthcare workers are no different. The federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA) requires that hospitals treat all those who walk through their doors. If an individual poses a threat to themselves or others, treatment can be delayed under EMTALA, but not denied. We need to do more to protect our healthcare workers.

Hospitals across Michigan are already taking active steps to reduce incidents of violence in the workplace. We have worked with consultants and other professionals on de-escalation techniques, enhanced hospital security, signage to discourage violent behaviors, and unfortunately, hand-to-hand violence aversion trainings. This legislation is a vital part of those efforts and would provide additional protections for hospital emergency departments.

Brian Peters, Chief Executive Officer

The MHA supports this legislation and encourages lawmakers to also consider amendments to cover violent attacks from patients and expand felony first responder protections to direct care workers. Any members with questions can reach out to Adam Carlson at acarlson@mha.org.