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January 25, 2022

Support of HB 267 – Criminal Law – Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member

The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair
Judiciary Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 101
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon, and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

House Bill 267 creates legal protections for public health officials and hospital workers. This legislation addresses the constant threats against these individuals, including intimidation, interference, and impeding from performing their duties. Penalties can include jail and a fine. Maryland is currently one of fifteen states that do not provide these protections.

News outlets have consistently reported on health officials and hospital workers receiving threats, many death threats, against their lives. These kinds of threats are increasing and becoming alarmingly commonplace. For example, on December 27, at Meritus Hospital in Hagerstown, after being informed that his wife had passed, Joseph Clark called his wife's care team, "advising he was on his way there and was going to shoot everyone and advised no one will stop him."

Health officials and hospital workers have been subjected to doxing, angry protestors, vandalism, harassing phone calls, social media attacks, and threats of bodily harm. Some of these officials have hired security firms to protect their safety. Nurses report screaming, intimidation, threats of physical harm, and other unacceptable workplace conditions. Burnout from the daily stresses of their job was challenging before the pandemic, and COVID-19 exacerbated this burnout, as levels of threats and abuse have steadily increased.

In 2019, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that seventy percent of the twenty-one thousand reports of violence on the job were in the healthcare field. Additional studies have shown vast underreporting of workplace violence, especially in nursing. As Dr. Ernest Grant of the American Nurses Association points out, "1.2 million additional nurses will be needed in 2022, and we are instead seeing increased numbers of nurses leaving the field." We need to do everything we can to protect these healthcare workers and encourage people to enter these noble professions.

Maryland should join the thirty-five other states around our country and protect our healthcare workers. For these reasons, I urge you to support HB 267, and I request a favorable report.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Lewis Young".

Delegate Karen Lewis Young