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Jim Lynch
Testimony, HB 312
House Judiciary Committee, Feb. 5, 2018

For the record, my name is Jim Lynch and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and Denali Center. Our community owned hospital and long term care facility provides care for a primary service area of more than 7000 miles.

Last year we delivered more than 1000 babies, had more than 40,000 patient days and treated close to 40,000 patients in our Emergency Department. We also experienced almost 100 documented instances of workplace violence, and many occurrences don't get reported because they've become so commonplace. Workplace violence is not rare. We care for many of the community's most challenged members and with this comes its own unique set of challenges. Unfortunately biting, kicking, spitting, and hitting have become regular occurrences.

These situations occur in all areas of the hospital. Staff throughout our facility are routinely subjected to verbal and physical abuse while at the same time providing critical patient care.

- I am in support of HB 312, which helps to address the serious concern of workplace violence in health care facilities. Alaska hospitals are experiencing an increase in workplace violence over the past year, including assaults with physical injury against caregivers. At Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and Denali Center;
 - Our nurses, physicians, and care providers are routinely punched, kicked, scratched, spit on and have things thrown at them.
 - Several staff members have required medical care as a result of the abuse.
- Violence should not be an acceptable workplace hazard, but unfortunately, for many nurses, physicians, and other caregivers, this has become the new norm. At Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, we're feeling the impact;
 - Employees quit to pursue job opportunities in less volatile environments. Some of the positions are hard to recruit for and are in high demand.
 - The relationship between a care provider and a patient is important – violence creates tension and stress in the relationship.
 - Nurses and Physicians who sustain injury at the hand of a patient often require medical care - this can create a delay of important care to the patient while the injured physician or nurse is replaced by another care provider. If this happens in the Emergency Department, it can create a shortage of physicians – making it more difficult to provide care to other patients.

- Increased workman's comp claims.
- Increased operational expenses – security, equipment, staffing, etc.
- Many assaults fall into the category of fourth degree assault in which an officer must have a warrant to arrest an individual. We have learned that this process may be part of the reason that police often cite and leave an individual on scene rather than arresting them. We support making it easier for law enforcement to remove perpetrators of assault by eliminating the need for a warrant when an assault has occurred at our health care facility.
- We support allowing sentences to be imposed above the presumptive range for felony assaults against a medical professional at a health care facility. This sends a clear message to our health care providers that they are supported and valued.
- We recognize legislation is only one potential solution to the complex problem. To successfully address this issue, each facility needs to implement a comprehensive strategy using evidence-based practices. At Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and Denali Center we've implemented the following strategies to keep our employees safe:
 - Increased staffing
 - Provided additional training and education
 - Security scheduled 24/7
 - Implemented a "threat alert" program
- We urge you to please pass this legislation and send a strong message to nurses, physicians and other caregivers that Alaska takes this issue seriously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Lynch
Chief Executive Officer
Fairbanks Memorial Hospital & Denali Center