

Kathy Wardwell
DHHS CRW district 6&7
LD 2067
25/55

Dear Legislators,

My name is Kathy and I have been a member of the crisis team for 23.5 years. I am 61 years old and have 1.5 years left to reach my 25 years of state service. I enjoy my job and find it very rewarding. Some days that year and a half feels within reach. On days when it is physically or emotionally draining it seems very distant. Crisis workers, also known as CRW's, are often in stressful and at times dangerous situations. We do not have the benefit of police escort when we respond to a situation in the community. At times the clients we provide 24/7 care for in our crisis homes can be challenging both physically and emotionally. I want to share an incident that happened to my co-worker in which I bore witness during a training via zoom. At the time of the incident, we were single staffing one individual at the crisis house. My co-worker, K.M., contacted me stating the client was making statements that he was going to kill someone. I immediately went to the crisis house and recognized that he was having a psychotic break. The client was transported to the ER for an evaluation. In the middle of the night the ER discharged him back to the crisis house. That morning 2 staff were present, K.M. and D.B. One was staffing the house and the other was attending a training over zoom. Everyone in the zoom training witnessed the horrific assault on D.B. by the client. She literally had to fight for her life as the client was on top of her choking her in a very small office space. K.M. was finally able to get the client off D.B. long enough for her to get out from under him and escape. DB sought medical attention and had to measure her neck for days. She suffered physically and mentally. The team would have lost a coworker had there only been 1 staff there at the time of the incident.

As you imagine this incident, please remember we do not have a code button to push for assistance. We are in an average home. Our only resource is to hope that we can get to the phone and call 911 if needed. We are often alone.

I would also like you to consider the hypervigilance that is required when we are working with a potentially dangerous, aggressive or psychotic individual. We work 12 - and 16-hour shifts. I want to share some of the physical effects hypervigilance has on the body:

- Rapid heartbeat/Palpitations as the body prepares for danger
- Hypertension due to constant stress
- Muscle Tension. Constant tightening of muscles can lead to chronic pain
- Fatigue. Mental and physical exhaustion from prolonged alertness
- Insomnia. The nervous system cannot power down
- Cardiovascular health

These physical effects can shorten a person's lifespan and have an impact on an individual's mental health.

Aside from hypervigilance, the role of the crisis worker often puts a lot of demand on the human body physically. CRW's may have to physically use restraint to maintain the safety of the client and others. In the past we have had a client that required several restraints a day to manage self-harm. This required the CRW to be in the same position for up to 15 minutes at a time, putting strain on several areas of the body, e.g. back, legs, knees, neck and arms. Crisis workers often need to help clients with their hygiene and do not have the benefit of lifts or other equipment typically used to assist clients with mobility issues. Again, this puts many demands on the human body. As we age our muscles lose endurance and flexibility which can affect coordination, stability and balance. We lose fluid in our joints usually in the shoulder and our hips/knees lose cartilage. All of the above increases the risk of injury. I personally will not benefit from passing this bill. However, I strongly believe that the next generation of CRW's and the current CRW's that will benefit should be granted the ability to retire at 55 years of age with 25 years dedicated to state service due to the

toll it takes on an individual's health and well-being.
Thank you for your time and consideration,
Kathy Wardwell, CRW