

MaineHealth

Testimony of Karissa Eide, RN

In Support of LD 1119

**“An Act to Clarify the Criminal Justice Statutes with Regard to Assaults on
Emergency Medical Services Persons”**

April 24, 2023

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Karissa Eide. I have been a resident of Brunswick since 2013 and a Registered Nurse in the Emergency Department at Mid-Coast Hospital since 2016. I am here to testify in support of “An Act to Clarify the Criminal Justice Statutes with Regard to Assaults on Emergency Medical Services Persons.”

During my time in the Emergency Department, I have seen a number of violent incidents directed towards front line staff, most of which are not covered under the current law because they are often perpetrated against security officers or other ancillary staff. These men and women work alongside us, protecting us and the patients we care for, yet they receive limited protection under the law.

One such incident occurred in January of this year. A patient in our Emergency Department repeatedly assaulted security staff, which usually involved punches to the face. The local police were called frequently and each time, the patient would behave appropriately once the police arrived. The fifth person the patient assaulted was a Nurse Practitioner. After that, there was a police officer stationed outside the patient’s room for the remainder of his stay. The patient committed no further staff assaults.

Like most healthcare workers, I have had my own personal experiences with violent patients. In 2020, a patient became so angry and frustrated that he threw a chair against a sliding glass door, shattering the glass. He then ran into the nurses’ station and knocked several computers to the ground. The local police were called to assist. While we were attempting to calm the patient, he physically grabbed my arm in the presence of both multiple staff members and town police officers. While the hospital pressed charges for the property damage, I filed a statement to press charges for the patient physically grabbing me. An officer took my statement and unbeknownst to me, that would be the end of the matter. I never received any follow-up from the police or from the district attorney, despite the fact that there were several witnesses, including police officers. Thankfully, I had no lasting physical injuries. But I was left with the feeling that the incident was not worth anything, or somehow I wasn’t worth anything. What did I need: stitches or a broken bone? At what point does the violence cross the line if it can be perpetrated in front of the police, yet still have no consequences?

A few weeks ago, I had another patient. He was elderly, in his 90s but he still lived independently. He seemed competent and did not appear to have signs of dementia. He too was frustrated and angry to be in the Emergency Department. He swore at me, was verbally aggressive, and swatted an object that I was offering to him out of my hand. I later found out that he was carrying a loaded gun in a fanny pack that was around his waist. Again, I have no physical injuries from that day. But I sure have lasting emotional wounds. I have been left wondering what would have happened if this man had continued to escalate.

We teach our kids that we have zero tolerance for bullying in schools, yet we have a very high threshold for allowing healthcare workers to be abused. While we care for our communities, my coworkers and I do not deserve to be the punching bags of frustrated or angry patients. Please help protect us and enact a law that will result in consequences for workplace violence against healthcare workers. Because what I fear is that without consequences now, we will end up talking about gun violence in our Emergency Departments.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer questions.