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Testimony of Representative Holly B. Stover presenting

LD 532, An Act to Protect Health Care Workers by Addressing Assaults in Health Care Settings

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, I am Representative Holly Stover, and I am here to present LD 532, a bill to increase the accountability of people who are volitionally violent towards health care workers. This bill does not impact individuals who have behavioral health diagnoses and are not in control of their actions.

In addition to my work in the Legislature, I serve on the Board of MaineHealth Lincoln Hospital. As a member of the Board, I gain insight into some of the struggles our hospitals and health care workers are facing. As you know, workforce shortages are plaguing our health care industry, resulting in loss of access to crucial services in some cases. While there are many reasons for the shortage, one of the most important and distressing is the level of violence that our health care workers face on a regular basis as they take care of patients.

We hear all too frequently about nurses, doctors, CNAs, and others who have been threatened, kicked, hit, and spit on by angry patients. These incidents occur both in the hospital and in outpatient settings, and they can arise when patients are frustrated with long waits, angry about policies, or experience other triggers. In 2024, MaineHealth tracked 688 violent incidents that resulted in injuries across its care settings. These incidents can be psychologically and physically harmful to our care team members, with many resulting in a temporary loss of ability to do their jobs. They also result in burnout, recruitment challenges, early retirements, and people leaving the health care professions altogether.

Last session, this committee advanced and the full Legislature passed LD 1119, a bill that made it a felony to assault a health care worker in an Emergency Department. Thank you for that, as it provides our ED care teams with comfort in knowing that we have their backs; that the State respects and acknowledges some of the greatest challenges they face in their jobs.

Why, though, should this law be limited to ED workers? Data shows that violent incidents occur across all settings, including outpatient offices, inpatient units and other services and programs. This bill is intended to send the message to all patients, families and others who interact with health care workers that the State is not willing to tolerate volitional assaults on health care workers, regardless of where those assaults occur.

Thank you for listening, and I hope that you will join me in supporting all of our health care workers by passing this bill.