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Mercy Hospital  
Northern Light Health Foundation  
Northern Light Pharmacy  
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

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

**Testimony in Support  
March 17, 2025**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am speaking today in support of this bill on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

In 2021 the Legislature created the Task Force to Study the Process for Bringing Criminal Cases in Situations of Violence Against Health Care Workers. Northern Light Health attended each task force meeting providing information on the incidences of violence against our healthcare workforce. The task force was the first time that a comprehensive group assembled to focus on health care worker violence and the process for bringing criminal cases. We strongly advocated that the task force recommend that the crime of assault includes healthcare workers in every hospital patient care setting. There was support for this, but it was not unanimous. The committee unanimously agreed to recommend that the law be expanded to include anyone working in an emergency department. The bill before you today expands the statute related to assault to all health care workers or persons employed or contracted by a health care entity licensed in the State of Maine. This is a critically important and fair expansion of the law. Healthcare workers who are assaulted should be supported by the law irrespective of the care unit where the felony offense occurred.

Incidences of violence against our staff certainly pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic but we did reach a peak of incidences in 2022 with a total of 834 events. Comparatively we had 799 in 2024. We have a system wide comprehensive approach to supporting our employees with a goal to eliminate acts of violence in our care settings. We have signage and posters throughout our facilities that advise patients and the public that we have zero tolerance for acts of violence against our staff. Staff are trained in de-escalation techniques to manage behaviors and staff have silent alarm buttons to summon a rapid response team for assistance. Our "You Report, We Support" campaign encourages employees to report violence when it does occur, we support them to

report the crime to local law enforcement and we reach out to the local district attorneys to communicate with them regarding enforcement of the law when a crime of violence has occurred. Despite all of the work that has been done to implement best practices the variation in the law where an assault in the emergency department is a felony but the same assault with harm to our staff in another care area is simply a misdemeanor is demeaning and offensive to each and every employee that is assaulted.

I want to be clear that the acts of violence occur everywhere our staff work including our physician practices, outpatient settings, nursing homes and in the homes of our patients when cared for by our home care and hospice team.

Here are examples that exemplify the need for the bill before you today, not one of these acts of violence happened in the emergency department.

- A patient became upset when told he could not take his own medications that were in his duffel bag. Security tried to prevent the patient from taking the medications and the patient struck the security person in the eye leaving him bleeding and bruised.
- A nursing assistant was feeding a patient that required assistance. Without warning the patient punched the nursing assistant in the face during the feeding
- A home care nurse was completing a clinical assessment and wound care for a patient. When the nurse turned away the patient hit her in the back of the head and pulled her by the hair causing the nurse to fall to the floor.

As I gathered information for testimony today, I was overwhelmed with incidences of harsh, offensive, threatening, graphic and frightening verbal assaults on our staff. While these acts are not covered by the bill before you, I feel strongly that you all should be aware that verbal abuse is a very real occurrence for our staff.

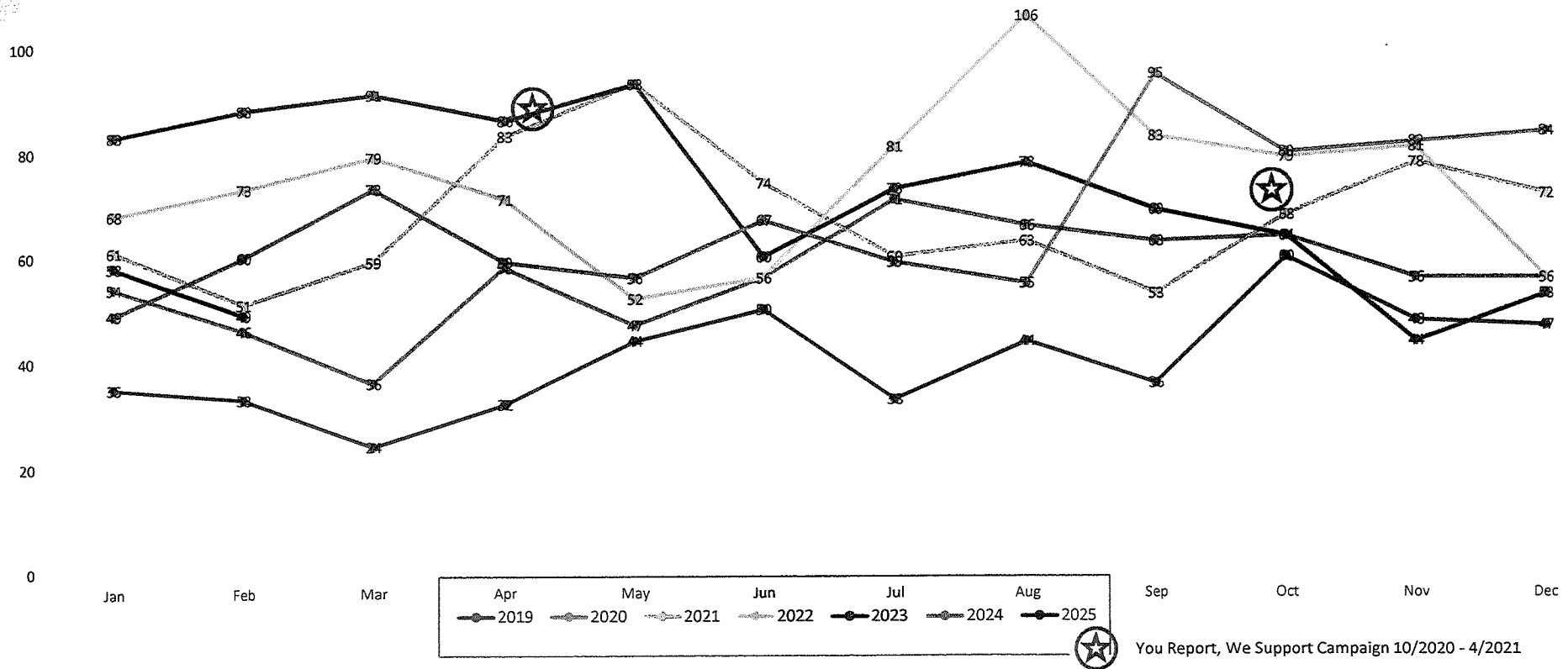
The risk of violence is real and can result in death. Last month a gunman held ICU staff hostage in a Pennsylvania hospital before killing a police officer and injuring 5 people. In 2023 a 63-year-old home health nurse was murdered during a home visit in Willimantic, Connecticut.

We ask for that you support this important legislation.

Thank you.

# Total Workplace Violence Events – Volume Trend

Workplace Violence Staff Events



You Report, We Support Campaign 10/2020 - 4/2021