

Testimony of Alisha Clavette

My name is Alisha Clavette. I am an RN II at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center. I have been employed there since March 2, 2009. I am writing to you today to provide testimony on behalf of myself and my coworkers that should help you in making your decision in granting us the much-needed 25/55 retirement benefit while you work to craft this supplemental budget.

Let me begin by telling you about the clientele that we work with. Many of our patients come to us from jails around the state. A great majority of them have some history of violence. We are required to work face to face with them for 12-hour shifts, providing support and care that includes treating them with dignity, respect, and compassion. This job is truly not for just anyone. It is often the case that patients refuse medication and it is a weeks long process to get court ordered medications, leaving these individuals to further decompensate, thus prolonging their time of stay in the hospital.

My work history at DDPC includes several acts of violence toward me, my coworkers and other patients. My personal experience includes having a patient break my chart room door and arming himself with a 20-inch wooden stake. Another patient holding a pen over my head in a stabbing manner, and a third patient swinging a metal floor fan by its cord. 3 years ago, I was punched in the head knocking me off my feet. I have never felt so vulnerable laying on the floor at the feet of a patient who just assaulted me to the point of concussion. I was forced to jump back to my feet as this patient was not even restrained. I missed 2 1/2 shifts after this assault and had to use my own sick time to cover it.

I cannot count the number of times that I have had to intervene by stepping in between patients assaulting other staff or other patients. Our work requires us to physically intervene to maintain safety. Not once have I seen a patient go willingly into a seclusion room or restraint when their level of dangerousness warrants it.

Although over the years our policies surrounding safety have changed greatly, the truth is there is still a high risk of violence on the units. Too many times I have seen chairs, tables, coffee carafes, hampers and garbage cans being thrown at myself and others. You just can't fix it all. We instead have to face the reality that the risk is there and the risk is real.

We live in a hyper vigilant state at all times which as you can imagine is not easy and probably leads to a decreased life expectancy. There are physiological responses during these high stress interactions that are beyond our control. You see, every time we have to put hands on somebody, even if only to redirect, our bodies respond with rapid heart rate, increasing blood

pressure, and often a boost of adrenaline. I have seen great nurses become so traumatized after being assaulted that they could not return to direct patient care. Please ask yourself, could you return to providing professional quality care to a patient who has assaulted you? That is the reality and the expectation, just return. And act like nothing ever happened.

The state has recently enacted the 25/55 benefit for our mental health workers, they are half of the team. They however depend on the critical thinking skills, rapid assessments and response, and sound clinical judgement skills of us registered nurses.

In closing, budget constraints have always topped the list for reason not to fund these types of "perks." I would like to make you aware that healthcare jobs any place else have a 36-hour full-time work week. The state of Maine holds us accountable to 40 hours, nurses are working one 36 hour week, and one 44 hour week to average the 40 hours in a two week pay period. We do not get paid overtime for the hours after 40. Also, we often work 12-hour shifts on holidays, the state only pays for 8 hours. So as you can see it is high time that the state provides us some benefits to help attract new staff and maintain the ones we've got. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

In Solidarity, Alisha Clavette