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Chelsea

Hello I am writing today to urge you to support the 25/55 bill for Mental Health Workers at Riverview Psychiatric Hospital here in Augusta. I am a Mental Health Worker who has worked at RPC/AMHI for over 24 years now. Working for long periods of time in the Psychiatric field, specifically direct care staff such as Mental Health Workers, is detrimental to your health, physically and mentally. Our rate of violence in the work place is 69 times higher than the national average of any other healthcare profession. And specifically in a state psychiatric institution the rate is 3 times higher than that of private facilities.

(bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/a-look-at-violence-against-psychiatric-aides-and-psychiatric-technicians.htm) It is generally accepted that assault records data are UNDERESTIMATES, because staff may under-report harrasment or assualt due to fear of being percieved as less competent or being blamed. (Richter + Berger 2006) So that 69% higher rate in reality is much higher if you take in to account that it is under reported to begin with. It is an extremely taxing profession and the studies state just that. If I work until my retirement age I will have 46 years of state service. No one, should even be allowed to do that job for that long. It's too much for anyone, and again there are studies out there that state just that! We love our job that we do and we are amazing at it. But we are tired, our bodies are tired, and our own mental health suffers. Of all the Mental Health workers that I've known over the years (dozens and dozens) that have retired after several decades, only a handful of them lived more than 2 years after retirement. Most are so physically or mentally (or both) damaged, they don't live very long to enjoy a retirement that they have earned. Its quite sad actually when you think about it. They dedicate their entire lives to literally saving others and most don't get the chance to enjoy what they've earned from it. I have been asked before why I continue to do this job even though we are 69 times more likely to have workplace violence and my answer is this- it's the same reason a trooper who was shot at yesterday still gets up and puts his uniform on today or the fire fighter who ran into a burning building last week still shows up for duty this week. It's a duty. It's a camaraderie. It's a service. We serve one of the most vulnerable populations in this state and we love it....we are just tired, and broken (physically and mentally), and we would like to have a chance to enjoy what we've earned. Thank you.