



Dave Thomas, Chairman
Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board
Department of Industrial Relations
#350 - 2520 Venture Oaks Way
Sacramento, California 95833
Via email: oshsb@dir.ca.gov
February 18, 2014
Re: California Safe Care Standard

Dear Chairman Thomas and Board members:

SoCalCOSH respectfully submits this letter in support of Petition 538: California Violence Prevention Standard, filed by SEIU Local 121RN and SEIU Nurse Alliance of California.

The Southern California Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (SoCalCOSH) strives for safe and healthy worksites across all industries. We do so by engaging in advocacy, direct training, worker empowerment and coalition building with all stakeholders – unions, worker centers, non-union represented employees, foundations and government institutions.

Throughout our thirty years of existence, we have witnessed and documented the workplace violence epidemic affecting several industries. The healthcare industry, in particular, is much more prone to workplace violence than most others. We are not alone in documenting this phenomenon. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, for instance, reports that 60% of all workplace violence targets healthcare professionals (Jill A. Janocha and Ryan T. Smith, 2010). This large workforce, totaling at least 18 million workers, is frequently assaulted and abused – physically, emotionally, sexually and psychologically. The injuries they endure are severe, and may last over the course of a lifetime. Many times, the injuries prove to be fatal. Every year, workplace violence affects approximately 2 million healthcare professionals (OSHA, 2014).

From our organizing, advocacy and research efforts we have learned of two main factors that determine the violent working conditions afflicting healthcare workers. First, the fact remains that, throughout spaces where decisions on health and safety conditions are made day in and day out, the prevailing norm is to accept serious injuries and fatalities as something seemingly natural that cannot be avoided. This attitude translates into a reactive approach toward violent attacks on healthcare professionals. Consequently, violence prevention programs and other preventive measures are discarded altogether.



Second, existing policy on workplace violence is outdated. There are several workplace violence regulations on the books, most notably California Assembly Bill 1083, California Labor Code §3203, and Cal/OSHA Health and Safety Code 1257.7. However, none of the existing health and safety regulations go far enough to adequately protect our cherished healthcare professionals. For instance, AB 1083 requires hospitals to conduct a security and safety assessment on an annual basis. Unfortunately, AB 1083 does not give Cal/OSHA the jurisdictional authority to either establish or implement this assessment. This is a prime example of loopholes found in existing health and safety regulations that ought to be rectified immediately.

It is our firm belief that most of the violence in our places of work can be predicted, eliminated and avoided altogether. We strongly feel that Petition 538: Workplace Violence Prevention Standard will go along way in securing safe and healthy workplaces in the healthcare industry and beyond. With this standard in place, healthcare workers would be better protected and the rate of injuries and fatalities would diminish. Just as important, it would also replace a reactive culture toward serious occupational hazards and replace it with a proactive one.

We implore you to approve Petition 538: Workplace Violence Prevention Standard and help bring California into the forefront of health and safety.

Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions about this.

Respectfully submitted,

Jorge Cabrera,

Coordinator

SoCalCOSH

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