

Cathleen Ehrenfeucht, MS, RN
SB25-166 Written Testimony
House Health and Human Services Committee
Chair, Representative Kyle Brown
April 7, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of Senate Bill 166 (SB-166). My name is Cathleen Ehrenfeucht and I am testifying on my own individual capacity. I am a long-time nurse with 38 years of experience, both at the bedside and in leadership. I currently serve as the Chief Nursing Officer for UHealth Highlands Ranch Hospital, as well as the Interim Chief Nursing Officer for UHealth Longs Peak and Broomfield Hospitals. Today, I am writing on behalf of the nurses who work for me and the urgent need to support this bill.

It saddens me to say that workplace violence has been a part of healthcare for far too long. Only recently have we begun to recognize that nurses should not tolerate any form of verbal hostility or violence, regardless of the source—including patients.

We recently had an incident in which the husband of a patient became violent and made heated threats toward the staff. Unfortunately, there has been a long-standing, underlying tolerance for this kind of behavior, stemming from years of acceptance. This issue urgently needs to be addressed. In this particular case, the threats were severe enough that the situation was escalated to leadership, and local law enforcement was called to intervene. The husband was detained, and his car was searched, leading to the discovery and seizure of weapons. This incident could have easily escalated, putting our healthcare team at significant risk.

The issue of workplace violence in healthcare is complex. Each scenario stems from different causes. Convening a stakeholder group to provide expert input on best practices and evidence-based strategies and ensuring that hospitals have a workplace violence prevention policy in place is a crucial first step in shining more light on this issue. Our healthcare teams need to feel safe while providing necessary care to these patients. No nurse should live in fear or suffer lifelong trauma from workplace violence.

As a nursing leader, my focus is on education and raising awareness about the risks that come with our profession. I want to ensure that my nurses feel empowered to protect themselves and that the stigma surrounding workplace violence is dismantled. For these reasons, and many more, I wholeheartedly support SB-166 and look forward to the valuable insights that the stakeholder group will bring.

I also want to personally thank Senator Mullica for his efforts in engaging with various groups and organizations to understand the complexity of this issue. I urge you to support SB-166, as it represents a significant step toward protecting healthcare workers.

Cathleen Ehrenfeucht, MS, RN

Elizabeth Spradlin, MSN, RN, TCRN
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Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of Senate Bill 166 (SB-166). My name is Elizabeth Spradlin, and I am testifying in my individual capacity. I am a nurse with 23 years of experience in healthcare, bedside nursing, and leadership. I currently serve as the Director of Nursing Innovation and Outcomes for the UHealth Southern Region. I am an active member of both our regional Workplace Violence (WPV) prevention committee and the WPV prevention executive steering committee at my hospital system.

For the past three years, I have been dedicated to supporting WPV prevention efforts through my participation in our local WPV prevention committee. I also co-published an article in the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) in May 2023 that shared strategies for meaningful change related to WPV. Citing ongoing work is needed to continue to move the needle and make hospitals a safer place to work. I believe engagement from all levels of the organizations, communities, at the state and national level is necessary to have a successful approach in addressing WPV. This is a very complex issue, and we are striving to change the culture that views WPV as an accepted part of the job.

Today, I am writing on behalf of the bedside nursing teams and the urgent need to support this bill. Healthcare workers in Colorado are increasingly subjected to verbal abuse, threats, sexual and physical assaults—including being kicked, spat on, and even strangled—while providing care. These widespread incidents take a serious toll on the wellbeing and retention of our entire healthcare workforce. Hospitals and health systems have made significant investments to improve safety through security measures, training, and prevention teams, but we cannot do this alone. The burden of preventing WPV is more than a hospital issue—it is a public health and safety issue that affects everyone.

While this bill emphasizes violence incidents in hospitals, we know that WPV impacts a variety of settings across our state, including ambulatory care clinics and long-term care facilities. Understanding the barriers to reporting these incidents is also needed to grasp the full scope of the problem. Senate Bill 166 provides a first step forward. By convening a diverse stakeholder group, it ensures the solutions and strategies developed will be evidence-based and practical.

Workplace violence has been a part of healthcare for far too long. Only recently have we begun to recognize that nurses should not tolerate any form of verbal hostility or violence, regardless of the source—including patients. I want to support the bedside teams by helping to provide skills to prevent WPV when possible, giving them the resources they need to address it in the moment, and supporting them through the aftermath. The issue of WPV in healthcare is complex. Each scenario stems from different causes. Convening a stakeholder group to provide

expert input on best practices and evidence-based strategies and ensuring that hospitals have a WPV prevention policy in place is a crucial first step in shining more light on this issue. Our healthcare teams need to feel safe while providing necessary care to these patients. No nurse should live in fear or suffer lifelong trauma from WPV.

As a nursing leader, my focus is on education and raising awareness about the risks that come with our profession. I want to ensure that nurses feel empowered to protect themselves and that the stigma surrounding WPV is dismantled. For these reasons, and many more, I wholeheartedly support SB-166 and look forward to the valuable insights that the stakeholder group will bring.

I also want to personally thank Senator Mullica for his efforts in engaging with various groups and organizations to understand the complexity of this issue. I urge you to support SB-166, as it represents a significant step toward protecting healthcare workers. The passage of this bill is not just important—it is urgent. The safety and wellbeing of our healthcare teams depend on it.

Elizabeth Spradlin, MSN, RN, TCRN

South Region Director of Nursing Innovation and Outcomes