



Herb B. Kuhn
President and CEO
P.O. Box 60
Jefferson City, MO 65102

October 18, 2017

The Honorable Eric Greitens
Governor of Missouri
Missouri State Capitol
201 West Capitol Avenue
Jefferson City, MO 65101-1556

Dear Governor Greitens:

On behalf of the Missouri Hospital Association's 145 member hospitals and more than 150,000 employees, I am writing to ask for your help and support to provide a more secure workplace for Missouri's physicians, nurses and other staff who provide lifesaving care to patients 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The incidence of workplace violence has become commonplace in communities of all sizes, demographic and socioeconomic compositions. Regrettably, health care facilities are no exception to this growing problem that represents a significant threat to employee safety and patient care.

The current challenges of violence are not limited to physicians, nurses or other health care staff — but also patients and visitors. Hospital executives in our state tell us that a decade ago, they would receive weekly reports of violent incidents in their hospitals, but now receive daily reports of incidents where staff are verbally abused, hit, kicked, shoved or beaten. Hospital staff are demanding action. The growing challenges of the opioid epidemic, limited access to mental health services and other social pressures have contributed to a steady rise in violence elevated beyond routine workplace challenges. Workplace violence is an urgent and profound issue for health care providers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 52 percent of all incidents of workplace violence are recorded in health care.

MHA's 2017 annual member survey of internal and external threats revealed that 50 percent of our hospital members rank violent encounters among the top three internal threats. MHA and hospital leaders are committed to protecting staff, while providing safe patient care. To further understand the issue, we have just completed a round of listening sessions, hearing from more than 225 of our hospital leaders, clinicians and front-line staff. Health care employees are experiencing physical, emotional and sexual violence weekly, and sometimes daily.

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To provide you with a real time example of these challenges, I recently visited a hospital in southwest Missouri. During the meeting, it was shared that seven of the beds in the hospital's 14-bed emergency department were filled with patients awaiting a behavioral health transfer/placement. A recent analysis by MHA of 2016 claims data revealed that mental health and substance abuse patients spent more than 550,000 combined hours in Missouri's emergency departments waiting for stabilization and discharge or transfer to an appropriate care setting. This is the equivalent of 63.1 years.

MHA has an extensive engagement underway with federal regulators, seeking support in the areas of health care worker safety through hospital preparedness programs and the Hospital Improvement Innovation Network. We also are seeking assistance through mental health and opioid grant-funding opportunities. Finally, we are seeking new federal guidance in the survey and certification program.

To be sure, this issue affects more than just hospital employees. Law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services and behavioral health specialists, just to name a few, all are experiencing these challenges. That is why in addition to a stronger federal response, we need strong state attention dedicated to finding a collaborative approach to this issue. Although the issues are complex, we believe that under your leadership and convening various stakeholders in health care delivery, we can find common ground and launch new and innovative programs to reduce workplace violence for health care workers. State-based support strategies to reduce workplace violence for health care workers could do much to improve the health care delivery system in the state.

Thank you for understanding the gravity of this situation and our request. Dedicated health care and other associated workers in Missouri must be confident they are safe and protected through systems and regulations so they may deliver high-quality and safe patient care to all Missouri citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Herb B. Kuhn", written in a cursive style.

Herb B. Kuhn
President and CEO

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