

TO: House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Liz Couto, BSN, BS, RN, CEN, Director, Chair, Government Affairs, ENA-Vermont

RE: Written Testimony in favor of S.36 Sec. 4 Repeal

The Emergency Nurse Association of Vermont is in favor of S.36 Sec. 4 Repeal of Prohibition from Public Inebriates at Department of Corrections.

Emergency Department (ED) overcrowding causes multiple problems for ED patients and staff, including increased waiting times, increased ambulance diversion, increased length of stay, increased medical errors, increased patient mortality, and increased harm to hospitals due to financial losses¹.

Emergency departments have become known for their overcrowding, chaos, unpredictability and violence. Emergency nurses are at high risk of experiencing workplace violence, which is cited in the literature as having a direct effect on general nurses' intention to leave. A high rate of nursing turnover may lead to short staffing, jeopardize the quality of patient care and increase overcrowding and wait times².

Workplace Violence in healthcare is currently considered an epidemic. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "the health care and social service industries experience the highest rates of injuries caused by workplace violence and are 5 times as likely to suffer a workplace violence injury than workers overall³". The incidence and prevalence of violence health care workers are being harmed by only increasing year over year and Vermont is now leading the nation with the highest rate of individuals away from work due to workplace violence⁴.

The current landscape of overcrowding in Emergency Departments has pushed the Healthcare system past it's point of being able to provide quality of care with the current number of resources provided to support patients prior to admission and after discharge. Forcing an additional population of high risk, vulnerable patients into Emergency Departments will only exponentially increase the risks for all patients needing care and hospitals past their breaking points.

The protection of all community members needs to be evaluated concurrently with any efforts to protect one population: knowledge and awareness will support putting in place the most appropriate, sustainable, strategies to ensure safety for all staff and patients and therefore a full repeal of S.36 Sec.4 is necessary.

¹[Emergency Department \(ED\) Overcrowding: Evidence-Based Answers to Frequently asked Questions | Elsevier](#)

² J Nurs Manag. 2022 Jul 3;30(6):1852–1860. doi: [10.1111/jonm.13728](#)

³[Workplace Violence in Healthcare, 2018 : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

⁴ [H.259~Devon Green~Workplace Violence Prevention Presentation~2-28-2025.pdf](#)