

## **Testimony of Andrea Paganie on HB 1992, the Health Care Facilities Workplace Violence Prevention Act September 11, 2011**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the House Committee on Health. My name is Andrea Paganie. I am a Development Specialist at the Staunton Clinic, part of the Heritage Valley Health System, in Rochester, PA located north of Pittsburgh. I am also Chapter Vice President of SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania.

I come before you today to share our experiences on working with my employer in a cooperative manner within the context of a safety committee or as described in HB 1992 as a violence prevention committee.

I am here to tell you that working collaboratively in a committee structure as proposed by HB 1992 can produce powerful and positive changes in the workplace.

Staunton Clinic is a community based mental healthcare facility that is about thirty (30) miles from Pittsburgh. The shooting at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic on March 8, was a wake up call for us at our facility. As mental healthcare worker myself, I know the potential scenarios for violence from the patient population we serve in mental health.

Prior to the tragic events on March 8, the committee met quarterly. Currently, we are meeting each month. The collaborative and proactive approach to safety issues has implemented many positive changes in the past five (5) months.

The members of the safety committee include: Four (4) union members/staff and Four (4) from management. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the day after the tragic shooting in Pittsburgh, the Staunton Clinic management team called a meeting to discuss and do a total review of the safety policy of its entire health system, Management separated its managers into focus groups. The Staunton Clinic Safety Committee, comprised of union staff members and management, met within the next five (5) business days and assigned each member of the committee to a focus group.

Focus groups included: 1) Policy/ Procedures/Protocols, 2) Program/Site Review, and 3) Engineering Controls. There were many discussions with front line staff about potential safety risks and options to solve the problem. The committee then met on a monthly basis to discuss the progress on the three (3) focus groups.

On Thursday, April 12, 2012 the committee invited Bill Borwegen, SEIU Director of Occupational Health and Safety, to speak at the safety committee meeting. Also Linda Graham, SEIU representative attended. This meeting was very helpful moving forward to enhance safety in all the sites. The efforts lead to the development of a strategic plan involving staff, management and experts in the field and highlighted the seriousness of the mission to create the safest work environment possible.

In the past five (5) months, our committee has implemented many changes to enhance our culture of safety. The following are new developments from collaborative efforts:

- 1) We identified that our codes did not reflect the scenario of an Active Shooter; therefore, we implemented a "Code Barricade". This is a descriptive code to eliminate any confusion in the event of an active shooter at our facility. The memo to all staff went out on June 5, 2012
- 2) The front lobby of our clinic at Rochester was completely redesigned to increase protection and lower potential risk to patients, staff and security. The renovation and redesign of our entrance lobby was completed Friday September 8, 2012. In this new lobby design, security guards have been placed in a new position to obtain a clearer view of the entrance and new uniforms will increase their visibility by patients. Bulletproof glass was approved in the plan of the reception area. Front desk receptionists have a phone tree to alert staff of potential dangerous clients and coordinate that with security. Panic buttons at front desk will alert local police. All offices have panic buttons and are tested on a monthly basis. Last but not least, the reception desk is positioned to have an escape route to a brick back office.
- 3) We enhanced our communication systems for potential dangerous situations. Now counselors who are at work out in the community will be receiving text messages to alert them of any current dangerous events in the community. And two-way radios were purchased for security and crisis personnel.
- 4) The committee is now actively developing training around the Active Shooter policy. As staff become accustomed to safer practices, a greater sense of competence and confidence so that critical responses will be automatic and well coordinated in the event of an emergent situation.

I feel fortunate that our health system responded in this manner by engaging front-line staff and implementing real improvements. I know through my involvement in our union that not all facilities operate in the manner. Our fellow union members at UPMC-WPIC have not had such success. I know that prior to the shooting at WPIC fellow union nurses there were frustrated that their safety committee did not address real workplace concerns and was more academic. As the nurses continued to push the need for different dialogue they were then removed from the committee. In recent bargaining at WPIC, management rejected the union proposed language on setting up a health and safety committee that would cover the scope of concerns from nurses at that facility in light of the shooting.

This is a concrete example as to why HB 1992 is now needed. Not all employers are like mine who will voluntarily set up such a valuable committee to deal with such serious problems that can literally save lives.

I am very proud of the work that our safety committee has done in response to ensure the highest quality of providing a safe environment for patients and staff. Total safety cannot

be guaranteed under any circumstances, but risk can be reduced with a focus on awareness, prevention, rehearsal and collaboration of the entire workforce that includes workers and management. Having management respect the voices of its workers and include their efforts is the only way to pursue the highest quality of care and safety.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our views today and I would be glad to respond to any questions.