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To: Nevada State Legislature Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Lisa Black, BSN, RN; Executive Director, Nevada Nurses Association

Date: March 19, 2003

Regarding: Assembly Bill 53

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Lisa Black. I am a Registered Nurse and the Executive Director of the Nevada Nurses Association.

I am here this morning to urge this committee's support of Assembly Bill 53 to enhance the criminal penalty for assault on a health care worker.

Recent research suggests that workplace abuse of health care professionals, specifically nurses, is a common and widespread problem. A recent survey of nurses in seven Western states, revealed that nearly one in three nurses surveyed had been a victim of a workplace violence incident in the preceding year. Most of these nurses had been assaulted by a patient, a patient's family member, or a coworker.

Injury surveillance conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Division of Safety Research, indicates that from 1980-1995, homicide was the third leading cause of death at the workplace and as early as 1991, 20 nurses had died from gunshot wounds sustained in the line of duty. There is compelling evidence that violence in the nursing workplace is steadily increasing. On April 9, 2001, nurse Alda Ellington, 47, was on duty in a Florida hospital when she was attacked and killed by a patient. On February 26, 2001, nurse Bernadette Moreno, 27, was killed by a patient's estranged husband while on duty in a Finegayan, Guam clinic. Closer to home, on October 28, 2002, University of Arizona professors Robin Rogers, 50; Barbara Monroe, 45; and Cheryl McGaffic, 44 were shot and killed by a disgruntled student. While she was not physically injured, Nevada nurse and Nevada Nurses Association member, Mary Koithan was a witness to this terrible tragedy. Certainly, the psychological effects of that terrible day will be with her always.

The aforementioned cases, however, capture only the most egregious cases of workplace violence and the majority are much more subtle and do not make news headlines. Working in a health care facility is considered to be the third most dangerous job in the United States and workplace violence takes a high toll on victims of assaults, and on their coworkers. Often, follow-up counseling is necessary as posttraumatic emotional stress is often a more debilitating problem for workers than are the physical injuries. In the end, when a health care worker's health suffers, so does productivity. In this time of a critical shortage of qualified nursing personnel, we cannot continue to lose these precious societal assets to senseless acts of violence.

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On behalf of the nurses of Nevada, I thank you for your attention to this important issue and look forward to continuing to work with the members of this elected body and with our industry partners to address the important issue of violence in the health care workplace. Again, I urge this committee to support passage of this important legislation to include health care workers in the list of occupations for which an enhanced penalty is applicable when the health care worker is the victim of an assault. I thank you for your time and would be happy to entertain any questions of the committee.