

Chair and committee members:

As organizations representing the voices and concerns of more than 300,000 working Minnesotans, we are proud of the work our members do every day to keep our schools, our businesses, and our state running.

Our members are also the people who keep our healthcare system working for Minnesotans. When you or your loved one shows up to a hospital, nursing home, or other care setting, it is working Minnesotans who greet you at the door, make sure you have a sanitary room and nutritious meal, and provide the care at the bedside that allows you to heal and recover in your most vulnerable hours.

It is these workers who have made Minnesota's healthcare system one of the strongest in the nation. But too often, when workers raise their voices and speak up in the workplace to protect care and working conditions for all of us, they face retaliation from their managers and healthcare executives. That is why our workers urgently need S.F. 4444, the Healthcare Employee Anti-Retaliation and Labor (HEAL) Act, and why we ask for your support.

As healthcare executives continue to slash staff levels with their focus on executive compensation and the bottom line, the need for workers willing to speak up and refuse the race-to-the-bottom in healthcare has never been greater. Rather than work with their employees to adjust staffing levels, shift patients to even out assignments, or work assignments to protect care and working conditions, managers and executives lash out at workers and exacerbate the debilitating shortage of staff in our care settings.

Retaliation can be obvious, as when workers face termination or suffer open hostility from their supervisors; however, more often, retaliation takes place in subtle ways. When healthcare workers tell managers they need more staff to protect safe patient care, and all too often, those managers respond by sending that worker home without pay, leaving even fewer workers to care for more patients. Other times, managers refuse scheduling or leave requests, pass workers over for promotions, or blacklist workers from other job opportunities. Then, in the unfortunate cases when something does go wrong at the bedside, hospital managers and executives sit down to decide what happened – and who to blame – without those who were there and without being present on the floor themselves. Under such deteriorating working conditions, it is no surprise that workers are being driven from the care roles that they want to work in, and where they are desperately needed.

This retaliation has a silencing effect that puts us all at risk. If workers stay silent or leave their jobs because they are ignored and ostracized by their managers, patients are left to suffer the consequences alone. Quality care depends on workers who care. To keep workers at the bedside and in other vital roles in our care settings, we need to protect those workers who fight for us.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation, and we hope our 300,000 members can count on your support this legislative session.

