March 13th, 2023

The Honorable Dave Cortese
Chair, Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee
1021 O Street, Room 6740
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 553 (Cortese) Workplace Violence Prevention – Support

Dear Chair Cortese,

The California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA), one of the state’s foremost grassroots senior and disability advocacy organizations, representing over 1 million Californians, is proud to support SB 553 (Cortese), which will address workplace violence incidents by requiring employers to implement basic protections that are intended to protect workers while at work.

We believe that California workers should not have to wake up each morning afraid that they will be assaulted or killed while at work. Unfortunately, we’ve seen that the opposite is true. For far too many Californians, the stress of simply earning a living and providing for a family is inhumanly compounded by a daily terror of being violently attacked while at work. Both data and experience show their fear is warranted.

Workplace violence incidents are becoming more prevalent across all different types of workplaces in California. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has identified workplace violence as the second leading cause of fatal occupational injury at the workplace and estimates that nearly two million workers are affected by workplace violence each year.

In 2014, Senator Padilla passed Senate Bill 1299 which required the Cal/OSHA Standards Board to promulgate regulations by July 1, 2016 to protect healthcare workers from workplace violence by mandating protections such as keeping a violent incident log, training, and addressing workplace violence in the injury illness and prevention plan (IIPP). On April 1, 2017, Cal/OSHA officially adopted the Healthcare Workplace Violence Standard, but this standard only offers protections for healthcare workers, excluding most of California’s workforce.

On January 12, 2017, in an effort to adopt workplace violence prevention protections for all non-healthcare workplaces, Cal/OSHA released a proposed draft of the General Industry Workplace Violence Standard. Six
years, and numerous workplace deaths, injuries, and incidents later, California workers are still waiting for Cal/OSHA to pass a Workplace Violence Standard to Protect Workers.

On May 17th, 2022, Cal/OSHA circulated yet another General Industry Workplace Violence discussion draft, but one that is significantly weaker than the Healthcare Workplace Violence Standard. There is no reason or logic as to why non-healthcare workers should enjoy less protections, or no protections, from being violently assaulted on the job than healthcare workers. Unfortunately, there has not been any progress since then on this standard. Workers, who fear for their lives going to work every single day, do not have years to wait for Cal/OSHA to act and adopt a General Industry Workplace Violence Standard.

CARA believes that SB 553 will urgently and swiftly move the needle forward by establishing a floor of protections for all non-healthcare workers experiencing workplace violence by requiring employers to implement the following safeguards:

- Requiring all non-healthcare employers to maintain a Violent Incident log of all violent incidents against employees including verbal harassment and post-incident investigations;
- Requiring all non-healthcare employers to provide active shooter training;
- Requiring retail employers to provide shoplifter training;
- Prohibiting employers from maintaining policies that require workers to confront suspected active shoplifters;
- Including, as part of the existing IIPP, an assessment of staffing levels as a cause for workplace violence incidents;
- Allowing an employee representative to be a petitioner for a workplace violence restraining order; and,
- Requiring employers to refer workers to wellness centers.

Affording Seniors viable resources to age with grace, dignity and independence - such as enhancing workplace safety - not only represent CARA’s foundational principles but we believe will ensure a safer, more accessible and inclusive California for our aging community.

Please vote YES on SB 553.

Sincerely,

Hene Kelly
Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)

Keith Umemoto
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)