

Workplace Violence in Health Care, Especially in Hospital Emergency Departments, is a National Crisis

Workplace violence against health care workers, including emergency nurses, is a national crisis. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2018 that health care workers accounted for 73 percent of all violence-related injuries that resulted in missed days from work. In addition, the BLS found that health care and social service workers were six times more likely to be victims of workplace violence than all other private sector workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic only made the problem worse. A survey conducted in 2021 revealed about 31 percent of hospital registered nurses reported an increase in violence during the pandemic.

Across the country, nurses and other health care workers are punched, kicked, spat on, stabbed or shot daily. Some even die from their injuries. Many suffer physical and emotional trauma that drives them away from the critical work of emergency nursing.

Emergency Nurses



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Source: Kowalenko T et al. Prospective study of violence against ED workers. (2013). American Journal of Emergency Medicine - 31 (1), 197-205.

Emergency Departments Experience Violence at Higher Rates

Unfortunately, assaults directed at workers occur at especially high rates in emergency departments, which are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Moreover, EDs are required under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act to stabilize and treat the emergency medical conditions of all patients. Health care professionals in the ED interact with members of the public when emotions are running high and behavior can sometimes become violent.

Studies show that emergency nurses and other ED personnel experience a violent event about once every two months. Moreover, a survey of emergency nurses revealed that 33 percent have considered leaving the profession due to workplace violence. Most incidents go unreported. Fewer get prosecuted. Given the shortage of nurses plaguing the nation, retaining these professionals should be everyone's priority.

The SAVE Act Will Increase Protections for Frontline Health Care Workers by Making Violence Against Them a Federal Offense

With the increase in violence against hospital workers and health care worker burnout, it is clear they need to be better protected. Their safety must be a priority.

Although many states have passed laws over the past decade to increase penalties for violence against health care workers, there is currently no federal law that protects hospital employees from assault or intimidation. The Safety From Violence for Healthcare Employees (SAVE) Act (H.R. 2584/S. 2768) would mirror protections for airline and airport workers and would allow extra tools for prosecutors to charge individuals threatening hospitals and their workers.

The legislation will allow federal authorities to prosecute those who assault hospital personnel. If enacted, those individuals could be charged with a federal crime with a prison term of up to 10 years. Aggravating factors, such as the use of a weapon, would further increase the maximum term of imprisonment. By creating stronger penalties for those who assault or harass hospital workers, this legislation would deter and prevent violence against hospital employees. Additionally, the bill would provide a clause of reasonable defense if the patient is mentally incapacitated due to illness or substance use.

The SAVE Act has Broad Support Among Health Care Providers and Hospital Groups

The SAVE Act is supported by broad coalition of health care organizations including the Emergency Nurses Association, American Hospital Association, American College of Emergency Physicians, America's Essential Hospitals, American Medical Group Association, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons, Children's Hospital Association, American Nurses Association, Common Spirit Health, Vizient, West Virginia Hospital Association and Florida Hospital Association.

House Request: Cosponsor and Support the Safety From Violence for Healthcare Employees (SAVE) Act (H.R. 2584).

This bill was introduced by Rep. Larry Bucshon, R-Ind., on April 13, 2023, and referred to the House Judiciary Committee for further action.

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Safety From Violence for Healthcare Employees (SAVE) Act (S. 2768).

This bill was introduced by Senator Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., on Sept. 12, 2023, and referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee for further action.