

Workplace Violence in Health Care Is a National Crisis, Even During a Pandemic

Workplace violence against health care workers, including emergency nurses, is a national crisis. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) found that although workers in the health care sector accounted for only 20 percent of workplace injuries, they make up about 50 percent of all victims of workplace assault. The COVID-19 pandemic, which included patient and visitor restrictions at hospitals, has only made the problem worse. A survey conducted in 2021 revealed about 31 percent of hospital registered nurses reported an uptick in violence during the pandemic.

In 2018, health care and social service workers were found to be five times more likely to experience workplace violence, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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. 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 our nation, retaining these professionals should be everyone's priority.

Despite Trends, There Is No National Standard to Prevent Workplace Violence in Health Care

Currently, there is no national standard in place aimed at preventing and responding to workplace violence in health care facilities. A national standard relating to workplace violence in health care would ensure that employers assess factors such as the physical security of their facilities, staffing issues related to security, training for employees on mitigating and responding to violence, and support for workers when they are assaulted. A national standard developed by OSHA would ensure that all health care employers take steps to protect their workers from violence and support them when assaults do occur.

The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. _____/H.R. 1195)

S. _____/H.R. 1195 will ensure that health care and social service employers across the country take specific steps to prevent workplace violence and ensure the safety of patients and workers. This legislation directs the Secretary of Labor, through OSHA, to require these employers to develop and implement workplace violence prevention plans that are worker-driven and comprehensive. In developing and implementing a workplace violence prevention plan, a covered employer would:

- Develop processes to identify and respond to risks and hazards that make settings vulnerable to violence
- Implement protocols to document and investigate violence
- Create an environment that supports employees who report incidents of violence, including non-retaliation policies
- Ensure that employees are appropriately trained in identifying and addressing hazards, as well as their rights with respect to workplace violence

We must address risks associated with workplace violence to enhance both nurse recruitment and retention. The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. _____/H.R. 1195) will ensure that emergency nurses and other health care workers have a safe working environment and receive support in addressing the widespread problem of workplace violence in health care.

Rates of **nonfatal workplace violence** against **health care workers** is up to



12
times higher

than the rest of the workforce.

Source: GAO 2016 report, page 10

Emergency Departments Experience Violence at Higher Rates

Unfortunately, assaults directed at workers occur at especially high rates in emergency departments (EDs), which are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Moreover, under federal law EDs are required to treat 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. As a result, emergency nurses are more likely to experience acute stress than other nurses.

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. _____). S. _____ was introduced by Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) on _____.

House Status: The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1195). H.R. 1195 was introduced by Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT) on February 22, 2021. It was passed in the House of Representatives on April 16, 2021 with bipartisan support. If your member of Congress voted for its passage, please thank them for their support during your meeting.