

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 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 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.

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.

The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 2663/S. 1176)

A national standard would ensure that all health care employers take steps to protect their workers from violence and support them when assaults do occur.

H.R. 2663/S. 1176 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 (H.R. 2663/S. 1176) 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.

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 screen 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.

House Status: Cosponsor and Support the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 2663). *The bill was introduced by Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., on April 18, 2023, and referred to the House Education and Workforce Committee and Energy and Commerce Committee for further action.*

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. 1176). *The bill was introduced by Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisc., on April 18, 2023, and referred to the Senate HELP Committee for further action.*