

# The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act

S. 1176 Senator Tammy Baldwin

H.R. 2663 Representative Joe Courtney

Violence against nurses and other health care workers in hospitals and other health care facilities is a growing epidemic across the United States. Nurses report being punched, kicked, bitten, beaten, choked, and assaulted on the job — and some have faced stabbings and shootings. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the hazard of workplace violence, with nurses reporting an increase of violent incidents on the job since the beginning of the pandemic. The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act would mandate OSHA to promulgate a standard that would require all covered employers to develop and implement prevention plans to reduce workplace violence incidents. The Workplace Violence Prevention bill passed the House of Representatives in both the 116th and 117th Congress with significant bipartisan support.

## Health care workers frequently experience dangerous workplace violence incidents »

- » In 2019, health care and social service workers reported five times the rate of injuries due to workplace violence than workers overall.<sup>1</sup>
- » A 2022 study found that on average, two nurses are assaulted every hour.<sup>2</sup>
- » A study published in 2021 found that nearly 85 percent of nurse respondents said they experienced more than one type of workplace violence over the previous year.<sup>3</sup>
- » Workplace violence is underreported by hospital employees. In a 2015 study, 88 percent of respondents had not documented in their employer's electronic system an incident of violence that they had experienced in the previous year.<sup>4</sup>
- » In NNU's April 2022 survey, 48 percent of hospital nurses reported an increase in workplace violence, up from 30.6 percent in September 2021 and from 21.9 percent in March 2021.<sup>5</sup>

## Workplace violence is bad for patients and hospitals »

- » Workplace violence experienced by nurses has been associated with decreased productivity<sup>6</sup> and increased employee turnover.<sup>7</sup>
- » Workplace violence also reduced the quality of patient care.<sup>8</sup>

## To prevent and reduce the frequency and severity of violent incidents in health care settings, a comprehensive workplace violence prevention standard must, among other things »

- » Broadly define workplace violence to include threats and the use of physical force, including incidents involving the use of firearms or dangerous weapons.
- » Require employers to develop unit-specific and facility-specific prevention plans rather than one-size-fits-all plans.<sup>9</sup>
- » Actively involve employees in developing, implementing, and reviewing the plan, and provide robust training programs for employees.<sup>10</sup>
- » Ensure that employers assess hazards and provide correction procedures, including staffing, trained security personnel, environmental risk factors, patient specific risk factors, alarm systems, and job design and facilities.
- » Require that employers establish effective reporting processes and policies to ensure that employees can report workplace violence without fear of retaliation; systems for communicating between coworkers, shifts, emergency services, and law enforcement about risks for violence; and Violent Incident Logs to track all incidents and threats.<sup>11</sup>
- » Mandate effective and prompt response to all workplace violence incidents as well as appropriate follow-up, including providing prompt treatment to injured employees and investigating whether any measures could prevent similar incidents in the future.

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## Sources »

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- 7 Sofield L, Salmond SW. Workplace violence: a focus on verbal abuse and intent to leave the organization. *Orthop Nurs*. 2003;22:274-283.
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