Health Care Workplace Violence Prevention Standards

Position

The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) supports the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R.1195), sponsored by Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT) in the House of Representatives and by Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) in the Senate. The Senate bill is expected to be reintroduced soon.

The purpose of H.R.1195 is to direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue a federal workplace violence prevention standard to protect workers in the health care and social services sectors. Under this Act, employers must investigate workplace violence incidents, risks, or hazards as soon as practicable; provide training and education to employees who may be exposed to workplace violence hazards and risks; meet record keeping requirements; and prohibit acts of discrimination or retaliation against employees for reporting workplace violence incidents, threats, or concerns.

Background

Health care and social service workers, including forensic nurses, are at high risk of assault by patients, clients, and members of the public. Peer reviewed studies and Bureau of Labor Statistics data show high injury rates from workplace violence for these workers. Furthermore, assaults on health care and social service workers are underreported, because reporting practices are burdensome, many health care and social service workers perceive such violence as part of their job, and they are often disciplined for reporting assaults. Data shows public employees are at even higher risk, but they are not covered by Federal or state OSHA in 24 states. This legislation would also cover those employees.

Research on health care workplace violence highlights the need for this legislation.

- Some 66 percent of registered nurses report experiencing workplace violence, according to a 2014 study published in the Journal of Emergency Nursing.
• The study found 54.2 percent of nurses experienced verbal abuse from patients and 29.9 percent experienced physical abuse. Nearly 33 percent of nurses reported verbal abuse by visitors and 3.5 percent reported physical abuse by visitors.

• On average, nurses only report 20 percent to 60 percent of workplace violence incidents, according to the American Nurses Association. In addition, 13 percent of nurses' missed workdays are due to workplace violence.

• In 2016, 16,890 workers in the private industry experienced workplace violence that required days away from work. Of those victims, 70 percent worked in the healthcare and social assistance industry, according to the CDC.

To cosponsor H.R.1195 please contact Maria Costigan in Rep. Courtney’s office at Maria.Costigan@mail.house.gov, and Mike Waske in Senator Baldwin’s office at Michael_Waske@help.senate.gov to be an original cosponsor of the Senate companion bill. Please contact IAFN’s Federal Representative, Patrick Cooney, at (202) 413-2629 (m) or at Patrick@federalgrp.com with any questions you might have regarding this issue.