

# Gae Magnafici: Addressing violence against our nurses

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On Tuesday, the State Assembly passed Assembly Bill 175, a bill I've co-authored with State Senator Dale Kooyenga. This bill addresses workplace violence against nurses by providing a felony penalty for assaulting a nurse. As a former nurse, I know firsthand how pervasive this issue has become, and I'm proud to help give much needed protection to our nurses in Wisconsin.

Nurses should never be afraid to go to work. They look after our loved ones by providing care to those in need, and every day they make a positive difference in people's lives. As nurses, we tend to place the well-being of our patients before our own safety.

Yet many nurses deal with the prospect of workplace violence on a frequent basis. A study conducted by the Wisconsin Nurses Association found that nearly two-thirds of nurses surveyed had experienced workplace violence while on duty within the previous year. Over half of those experiencing workplace violence had encountered three or more episodes. Twenty percent of those experiencing workplace violence reported traumatic stress associated with these episodes.

I also dealt with this issue firsthand during my time as a nurse. Parents under duress from separation or divorce would lash out at my colleagues and me. People looking for drugs would intimidate and confront us to get what they wanted. Family members and visitors impaired by drugs or alcohol were often unpredictable. In these unstable situations, it felt as though my colleagues and I were walking on eggshells.

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In spite of these tense, violent, and disturbing situations, it was not until my work

on this bill that I took time to really reflect on all the workplace violence I faced. The work that I did was too important. I ignored the dangers to myself because the care of my patients was my only focus. Such was the case with many of my colleagues. Reporting workplace abuse was a low priority compared to caring for our patients.

By providing a harsher penalty for these types of abuses, we remind nurses across the state of how important their safety is, and that our laws provide them with protections because of the critical and personal nature of their profession. They must take whatever steps they need to provide a safe environment for themselves and their patients.

The public must know that we stand behind our nurses, and that abusive behavior towards those who provide care will not be tolerated. A safer environment for nurses will mean a safer environment for all patients and a higher quality of care.

It has been a privilege to work on this bill with Senator Kooyenga. I'm proud of the passage of this bill through the Assembly and the Senate, and I hope Governor Evers will recognize the great need for this bipartisan bill and sign it into law.

*-Magnafici, R-Dresser, represents the 28th Assembly District.*