

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces bill to protect health care professionals from workplace violence

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Legislation creates standards requiring health care and social service employers to implement workplace violence prevention plan and protect employees from violent incidents

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the nation celebrates National Nurses Week, U.S. Senator Baldwin, a member of the Senate Employment and Workplace Safety Subcommittee, introduced legislation to protect health care and social services employees from workplace violence.

The *Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act* directs OSHA to issue a standard requiring health care and social service employers to write and implement a workplace violence prevention plan to prevent and protect their employees from violent incidents.

“Our nurses, doctors, social services workers, and health care professionals deserve to work in a safe environment free from violence,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Health care workers have faced unprecedented obstacles just to stay healthy and do their jobs through the pandemic, and on top of it all, they have seen senseless violence against them. It is unacceptable and we must provide basic protections and safety standards to a workforce that serves people during some of their most vulnerable times.”

Incidents of violence against health care and social service workers are on the rise,

with the pandemic only exacerbating the issue. Workers in the healthcare and social service industries experience the highest rates of injuries caused by workplace violence. A 2016 GAO study reported that rates of violence against health care workers are up to twelve times higher than rates for the overall workforce, and 70% of nonfatal workplace assaults in 2016 occurred in the health care and social assistance sectors.

The *Workplace Violence Prevention in Health Care and Social Services Act* would ensure that health care and social service workplaces adopt proven prevention techniques and are prepared to respond in the tragic event of a violent incident.

The bill is also supported by Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Tina Smith (D-MN), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Gary Peters (D-MI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Patty Murray (D-WA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Christopher Coons (D-DE), and Bob Casey (D-PA).

The *Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act* received support from a host of health care and social service professionals, as well as unions representing workers in these sectors, including National Nurses United (NNU), American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), Emergency Nurses Association (ENA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), AFL-CIO, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), American Federation of Government Employees, International Association of Fire Fighters, United Steelworkers (USW), and Public Citizen.

“This groundbreaking legislation will hold health care and social service employers accountable for the safety of their workers,” **said Bonnie Castillo, RN and executive director of NNU.** “It’s time for employers to stop putting people’s lives in danger. Everyone deserves to be safe in their workplace, and that includes hospitals, clinics, and social service settings that are so crucial now more than ever given the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. We are grateful for the leadership of Sen. Baldwin and Rep. Courtney for spearheading this important legislation.”

“Health care and social service workers, especially women, are at greatest risk of violence on the job,” **said AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler.** “These workers are on

the front lines, serving as caretakers to our families, friends and those in need. This bill is about protecting the lives of these brave heroes, and every single member of Congress should support this critical, life-saving legislation.”

“Our nurses and health industry workers care every day for the sick, the elderly and the mentally ill, yet they often feel unsafe or unprotected themselves from the assaults that occur in hospitals and other healthcare-related settings,” **said Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers.** “While the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has left these workers vulnerable, incidents of workplace violence continue to rise with 69 percent of reported cases occurring in healthcare settings. Thankfully, this bill addresses this increasing trend head-on and provides long-needed protections and specific and enforceable safety standards for people who work in front-line healthcare jobs.”

“There are too many terrifying and disheartening stories about health care workers assaulted on the job,” **said ACEP President Gillian Schmitz, MD, FACEP.** “Physical and verbal attacks would not be tolerated in any other workplace—they should not be allowed in a health care setting. Emergency physicians are grateful for the leadership of Sen. Tammy Baldwin and others in Congress who are leading important efforts to protect the professionals on the front lines so that they can focus on patient care without worrying about their personal safety.”

“Alongside the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, workplace violence and harassment in health care facilities continues to be on the rise all across our nation,” **said Dr. Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN—President, American Nurses Association.** “Nurses have experienced everything from verbal and physical abuse to sexual harassment and bullying from patients and even family members. Tolerating assaults at work is not in any nurse’s job description. Nurses were hailed as heroes earlier in the pandemic and we should treat them as such. I am thrilled that Senator Baldwin and others in Congress understand this and are doing something about it. ANA applauds the members of Congress who remain committed to keeping this issue at the forefront and working toward a solution for the well-being of our nation’s nurses.”

“Every emergency nurse has lived through the physical and emotional pain caused by violence in the emergency department. When these incidents are dismissed as ‘part of the job,’ it minimizes the human toll on health care professionals who are injured merely because they went to work to care for patients,” **said ENA President Jennifer Schmitz, MSN, EMT-P, CEN, CPEN, CNML, FNP-C, NE-**

BC. “When we say No Silence on ED Violence, it’s a call for more health care professionals to speak up about their experiences so that hospital leaders, law enforcement, prosecutors and legislators can’t ignore the chorus calling for change.”

“From bites and scratches to life-threatening attacks, workplace violence is a serious problem for our nation’s health care and social service workers,” **said USW International President Tom Conway.** “The USW applauds the reintroduction of the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act, which would require OSHA to finally hold employers accountable for addressing workplace violence. These workers selflessly put their lives on the line to care for the sick and vulnerable. We owe it to them to act quickly and decisively to help keep them safe on the job.”

“Health care and social service workers often put themselves in harm’s way to provide invaluable services to our communities,” **Lee Saunders President of AFSCME said.** “For their devotion and sacrifice, these everyday heroes deserve safe workplaces – with enforceable standards and practices in place – to ensure that they return home to their families when their shifts are over. Senator Baldwin respects these front-line heroes and we applaud her for her leadership on their behalf.”