

# Violence prevention measures move in Congress

Assaults on the job are a hazard for nurses.

By Lisa Stand, JD, and Ruth Francis, MPH, MCHES

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** opened a window for elected leaders to see the safety risks—including workplace violence—that nurses face every day on the job. One welcome result is a bill passed by the U. S. House of Representatives to engage healthcare employers in workplace violence prevention. The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (H.R. 1195) passed in April 2021 with wide bipartisan support. Now eyes are on the Senate for final passage. As of press time, Senate legislation hasn't been introduced.

Frontline nurses are burdened with a heightened risk of violence every day on the job. In 2020, the American Nurses Association (ANA) heard directly from nurses telling their stories of patients assaulting them, throwing objects at them, biting them, and more. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates that workplace violence rates in healthcare and social assistance settings are 5 to 12 times higher than the estimated rates for workers overall.

Policymakers have begun to recognize the need to prioritize violence prevention in these settings. If passed by the Senate and signed into law, H.R. 1195 would charge the Occupational Safety and Health Administration with creating standards to hold healthcare employers accountable for addressing workplace violence risks.

In addition to nurse injury and lost time at work, violence in healthcare settings can adversely affect patient care quality and care outcomes and reduce the nurse's level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Healthcare stakeholders also are reaching consensus that more must be done to prevent workplace violence. In 2020, the National Qual-

ity Partners, a program of the National Quality Forum, called for broad stakeholder action to address violence in healthcare. In June 2021, The Joint Commission announced it was adding workplace violence prevention to its safety standards for hospitals, starting in January 2022.

ANA applauds The Joint Commission for its private sector leadership in taking this issue seriously. However, federal legislation is still needed to make nurses safer. The introduction of H.R. 1195 is timely as nurses continue to report workplace bullying and violence, now exacerbated by the pandemic. According to an ANA survey, one in four nurses is assaulted, and the GAO estimates that only 20% to 60% of the incidents are reported. To show the reality of the violence that nurses experience, ANA created a video compilation of experiences shared by nurses. Their stories are read by ANA staff. To view the video, visit the #EndNurseAbuse website at [nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/end-nurse-abuse](https://nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/end-nurse-abuse).

ANA continues to support nurses and increase awareness of violence in the workplace. Recent blogs, featured stories, brochures, and videos ensure that this issue remains on the forefront. The #EndNurseAbuse website also offers helpful resources, and the pledge to support all healthcare workers on this issue has over 29,000 signatures. If you haven't already done so, text PLEDGE to 52886.

For more information about H.R. 1195 and other legislative initiatives to prevent workplace violence in healthcare, visit [RNAction.org](https://RNAction.org).

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