

November 20, 2019

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing nurses, social workers, psychiatric, home health and personal care aides, as well as other workers in the healthcare and social service industries, we urge you to vote yes on H.R. 1309, the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act. When healthcare and social service professionals show up to work, they shouldn't have to worry about whether they are going to be injured in an assault. The many professionals who face risk of assault every day include not only those working in hospitals, clinics and mental health facilities, but also those providing services in patients' homes, and outside the four walls of an office.

Healthcare and social service workers are nearly five times more likely to be assaulted than other workers, and the violence is growing. Between 2007 and 2017, the rate of violent injuries grew by 123 percent in hospitals, 201 percent in psychiatric hospitals and substance use treatment facilities, and 28 percent in social service settings. The costs of this violence are high: in injury rates, in professionals being driven from doing the work they love, and in workers' compensation claims and staff shortages.

Currently, there is no federally enforceable violence prevention standard specifically covering healthcare and social services, and federal guidelines do not cover those working in public facilities. H.R. 1309 would require hospitals, residential treatment facilities, clinics at correctional or detention facilities, substance use disorder treatment centers, and other service facilities to develop and implement comprehensive violence prevention plans and provide whistleblower protections for workers. We hear from members about violence all the time: a nurse choked to the point of unconsciousness; a case manager who has suffered bone fractures and debilitating brain injuries from being thrown against walls and floors; social workers brutally attacked, and even killed, when conducting visits to client homes.

No one should face violence, intimidation, or fear for their safety while working to help others and save lives. Violence is not just "part of the job," and studies show that prevention plans work. Many violent incidents can be predicted and minimized with the right staffing, policies and protocols; and this legislation builds upon well-established guidelines from the Department of Labor.

This bill is essential to making healthcare and social service settings safer for workers, but also safer healing environments for patients. When a patient harms a social worker or other clinician, it is traumatizing not only for the clinician but also for the patient; and it sets treatment back for months, if not years. Patients witnessing violence also are traumatized.

We urge you to support the nurses, social workers and other healthcare and social service professionals in your district by voting for H.R. 1309, the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act.

Alliance for Retired Americans
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
American Public Health Association
Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) of Southwestern PA
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Emergency Nurses Association
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
Midstate Education & Service Foundation
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)
National Association of Rural Mental Health (NARMH)
National Association of Social Workers
National COSH
National Nurses United
National Rural Social Work Caucus
People's Action
Philadelphia Area Project on Occupational Safety and Health (PhilaPOSH)
Rhode Island Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (RICOSH)
School Social Work Association of America
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Smart Transportation
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union
United Steelworkers
Worksafe