

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

November 20, 2019

Dear Representative:

I am writing on behalf of the AFL-CIO to urge you to vote for the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Services Workers Act (H.R. 1309) when it is brought to the floor tomorrow. This bill would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue a federal workplace violence prevention standard to protect workers in health care and social services from injury and death. We also urge you to oppose the amendment that will be offered by Rep. Byrne.

Workplace violence is a serious and growing safety and health problem that has reached epidemic levels. Workplace violence is now the third leading cause of job deaths, and results in more than 30,000 serious lost-time injuries each year. Nurses, medical assistants, emergency responders and social workers face some of the greatest threats, suffering more than 70% of all workplace assaults. Women workers particularly are at risk, suffering two out of every three serious workplace violence injuries.

H.R. 1309 would help protect these workers by requiring employers in the health care and social service sectors to develop and implement a workplace violence prevention plan, tailored to specific workplace and employee populations. As part of the plan, employers would be required to identify and correct hazards, develop systems for reporting threats of violence and injuries, provide training for workers and management and protect workers from retaliation for reporting workplace violence incidents. The bill ensures that frontline workers have input, helping employers identify common sense measures like alarm devices, lighting, security, and surveillance and monitoring systems to reduce the risk of violent assaults and injuries.

The bill's requirements for the workplace violence prevention plan are based upon existing guidelines and recommendations from OSHA, NIOSH and professional associations. Scientific studies have documented that the implementation of such prevention plans significantly reduces the incidence of workplace violence. Similar measures have been adopted in a number of states and implemented by some employers; however, there is no federal OSHA workplace standard, leaving the majority of healthcare and social service workers without effective protection.

The AFL-CIO opposes the Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute that will be offered by Rep. Byrne as it will continue to delay protections for workers and will weaken the underlying protections of H.R. 1309. Working people need protection from workplace violence now, and should not have to wait seven years or more, the average time it takes for OSHA to issue a safety and health standard. It has been nearly three years since OSHA issued a Request for Information on workplace violence and it has missed all three deadlines for initiating further action on the rulemaking. Importantly, the amendment offered by Rep. Byrne removes the

prohibition against discrimination and retaliation against employees who report a workplace violence incident, threat or concern, and who seek assistance or intervention from the employer, law enforcement, agencies and other authorities.

In recognition of the urgency to protect these workers from dangerous assaults, and of OSHA's failure to act, we support the underlying bill, which requires OSHA to develop an interim standard within one year and a final standard within 42 months. OSHA issued its first guidance to employers on protecting health care and social service workers from workplace violence 23 years ago in 1996. These frontline workers cannot wait any longer; their lives are in danger.

The underlying bill has broad support from health care professionals, safety and health professionals and healthcare unions including the National Association of Social Workers, American Public Health Association, American Industrial Hygiene Association and American Society of Safety Professionals.

We strongly urge you to vote for H.R. 1309 to help protect health care and social service workers from the growing threat of workplace violence and unnecessary injury and death.

Sincerely,



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Director, Government Affairs

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

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