

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

May 12, 2023

Dear Senator:

I am writing on behalf of the AFL-CIO to urge you to cosponsor the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Services Workers Act (S.1176), introduced by Senator Baldwin. This bill would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue a federal workplace violence prevention standard to protect workers in health care and social services from injury and death. This important legislation passed the House during the 117th Congress by a vote of 254-166, with 38 Republicans voting in support. The Senate must now pass this legislation.

Workplace violence is a serious and growing safety and health problem that has reached epidemic levels. In 2021, workplace violence was responsible for more than 481 workplace homicides, and more than 27,000 serious (lost-time) injuries for workers in 2020. Workplace violence events increased by 70% in health care and social assistance (private industry) between 2006 and 2020. Women are disproportionately affected. Workplace homicide is a leading cause of work-related death for women; women suffer seven of every 10 serious workplace violence events.

An OSHA standard under S. 1176 would 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 workplaces and worker populations. As part of the plan, employers would be required to work with employees 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. Common sense prevention measures include alarm devices, lighting, security, and surveillance and monitoring systems to reduce the risk of violent assaults and injuries.

The requirements for a workplace violence prevention plan are based upon existing recommendations from OSHA, NIOSH and professional associations, and scientific studies have found these guidelines to significantly reduce the incidence of workplace violence. Similar measures have been adopted in several states and implemented by some employers. Currently, however, there is no federal OSHA workplace standard, which would ensure these measures are in place. The majority of healthcare and social service workers lack effective protection and remain at serious risk while OSHA has been slow to act.

In recognition of the urgency to protect these workers from dangerous assaults, 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 27 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 health care unions including the National Association of Social Workers,

American Public Health Association, American Industrial Hygiene Association and American Society of Safety Professionals.

We urge you to support S. 1176 to help protect health care and social service workers from the growing threat of workplace violence and unnecessary injury and death.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Samuel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and a long, sweeping tail.

William Samuel
Director, Government Affairs