



August 15, 2022

Douglas L. Parker  
Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health  
U.S. Department of Labor  
Occupational Safety & Health Administration  
200 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Room Number N3626  
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Assistant Secretary Parker:

I am writing to express the American College of Physician's concern about the rising problem of workplace violence in the health care sector, particularly among physicians and other health care professionals who administer vaccines. The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician membership society in the United States. ACP members include 160,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge, clinical expertise, and compassion to the preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. Internal medicine specialists treat many of the patients at greatest risk from COVID-19, including the elderly and patients with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and asthma.

Physicians and other health care professionals face a growing number of threats, intimidation, and harassment in the workplace. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the incidence rate of nonfatal violence to health care workers grew from 6.4 incidences per 10,000 full time workers in 2011 to 10.4 incidences per 10,000 workers in 2018 and health care and social service industry professionals are 5 times more likely to be injured from workplace violence than workers in other industries (1). In the past decade, the United States Department of Justice prosecuted several instances of violence targeting reproductive health clinics (2). Many physicians, scientists, and public health officials have experienced harassment by anti-vaccination groups and political extremists because of mask requirements, quarantines, and other policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Idaho, anti-vaccination groups and other protesters harassed members of a county health board (including a family physician) at their homes (3). California State Senator Richard Pan, a pediatrician and vaccine proponent, was assaulted by an anti-vaccine activist who live-streamed the incident on Facebook (4).

A January 2021 research letter found that a about one-quarter of physicians surveyed have experienced online harassment for a variety of reasons, including their recommendations regarding vaccines; one physician said he received negative online ratings and even death threats from a person with anti-vaccination beliefs (5,6). Incidents like these have taken a toll on the public health community. As of December 2020, 181 state and local public health department leaders have resigned, retired, or been fired during the pandemic, creating a potential leadership vacuum during the vaccine rollout (7). ACP

firmly believes that no one should be subject to harassment, physical, or verbal violence at their place of work, and has [repeatedly spoken out](#) to condemn violence against physicians and other health care workers (8,9). In September 2021, ACP adopted policy on [Promoting Policy Standards for Workplace Violence Prevention and Management](#) (10). That policy recognizes the harm violence causes, calls for additional research to better understand workplace violence and the most effective interventions, and supports legislative efforts to reduce and prevent instances of workplace violence and bolster workplace safety.

To help prevent future workplace violence, ACP urges the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and other relevant federal agencies to develop, implement, and enforce a national standard addressing workplace violence in the health care setting. We appreciate the actions the agency has taken, including providing additional training and support for OSHA inspectors, releasing guidance on how to respond to workplace violence-related hazard alert letters, and collecting information on effective and economical workplace violence prevention best practices (11). The agency should release a national standard on workplace violence in the health care sector as soon as possible to prevent injury among physicians and other health care workers who administer vaccines, practice in reproductive health clinics, and provide other crucial medical services.

Thank you for considering this request. Please contact Ryan Crowley, Senior Associate for Health Policy, at [rcrowley@acponline.org](mailto:rcrowley@acponline.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Mire', enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.

Ryan Mire, MD, FACP  
President  
American College of Physicians

- 1 Bureau of Labor Statistics. Fact Sheet – Workplace Violence in Health Care, 2018. April 2020. Accessed at <https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/workplace-violence-healthcare-2018.htm>
- 2 U.S. Department of Justice. Recent Cases of Violence Against Reproductive Health Care Providers. June 29, 2022. Accessed at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/recent-cases-violence-against-reproductive-health-care-providers>
- 3 Boone R. Idaho health board meeting halted after ‘intense protests.’ AP. December 9, 2020. Accessed at <https://apnews.com/article/idaho-health-board-meeting-halted-8f13d99fa5ddc8720c106a2f8ff50663>
- 4 Farzan AN. ‘Yeah, I pushed you’: Anti-vaxxer cited for assaulting lawmaker while live-streaming on Facebook. Washington Post. August 22, 2019. Accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/08/22/yeah-i-pushed-you-anti-vaxxer-cited-assaulting-lawmaker-while-live-streaming-facebook/>
- 5 Carbajal E. 1 in 4 physicians experience harassment on social media, study finds. Becker’s Hospital Review. January 5, 2021. Accessed at <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/hospital-physician-relationships/1-in-4-physicians-experience-harassment-on-social-media-study-finds.html>
- 6 Bowen A. ‘We’re getting attacked.’ Even before COVID-19, doctors faced online harassment, including death threats. The pandemic makes it worse. Chicago Tribune. January 6, 2021. Accessed at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-life-covid-health-care-workers-harassment-pandemic-tt-20210106-u5praqcvuveptp3xi2n2yo4wf4-story.html>
- 7 Barry-Jester AM, Recht H, Smith MR. Pandemic Backlash Jeopardizes Public Health Powers, Leaders. AP. December 15, 2020. Accessed at <https://khn.org/news/article/pandemic-backlash-jeopardizes-public-health-powers-leaders/>
- 8 American College of Physicians. ACP Speaks Out Against Attacks on Physicians. ACP Advocate. September 11, 2020. Accessed at <https://www.acponline.org/advocacy/acp-advocate/archive/september-11-2020/acp-speaks-out-against-attacks-on-science-during-pandemic>
- 9 American College of Physicians. Internists say harassment of physicians is unacceptable. Press release. February 4, 2022. Accessed at <https://www.acponline.org/acp-newsroom/internists-say-harassment-of-physicians-is-unacceptable>
- 10 American College of Physicians. Policy Statement on Promoting Policy Standards for Workplace Violence Prevention and Management. Accessed at [https://www.acponline.org/acp\\_policy/policies/position\\_statement\\_on\\_promoting\\_policy\\_standards\\_for\\_workplace\\_violence\\_prevention\\_and\\_management\\_sept\\_2021.pdf](https://www.acponline.org/acp_policy/policies/position_statement_on_promoting_policy_standards_for_workplace_violence_prevention_and_management_sept_2021.pdf)
- 11 U. S. Government Accountability Office. Workplace Safety and Health: Additional Efforts Needed to Protect Health Care Workers from Workplace Violence. Accessed at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-16-11>