



September 6, 2022

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sen. Baldwin:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I would like to convey our support for the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act, S. 4182. ACP 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.

This legislation would direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to implement standards requiring employers of health and social service personnel to develop comprehensive workplace violence prevention plans and require violent incidents be reported to the U.S. Department of Labor on an annual basis. ACP has great concern for the safety of all health care personnel and patients, including the workplace violence currently faced by physicians and other health care workers.

ACP's physician members 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 five 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 In one instance, 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 study found that 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}

Should it be useful to your efforts, ACP has policy [on Promoting Policy Standards for Workplace Violence Prevention and Management](#).¹⁰ This 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. ACP has also [supported](#) H.Res.909, which expresses support for health care personnel and condemns workplace violence faced by physicians and other health care workers. ACP supports additional federal protections, including but not limited to, legislation based on the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act for physicians, health care and public health professionals, and associated team members who educate on, administer, or distribute vaccines. Lastly, ACP recently [urged](#) OSHA to develop, implement, and enforce a national standard addressing workplace violence in the health care setting.

ACP supports legislative efforts to reduce and prevent instances of workplace violence and bolster workplace safety. The OSHA standard, as called for in S. 4182, would require employers within the health care and social service sectors to develop and implement a plan to protect their employees from workplace violence. The standard would be developed in two stages: an interim final standard shall be issued within one year of enactment, and then a final standard shall be issued within 42 months of enactment. As stated previously, ACP has urged OSHA and other relevant federal agencies to develop, implement, and enforce a national standard addressing workplace violence in the health care setting. The OSHA standard would cover tens of thousands of facilities, including hospitals, residential treatment facilities, non-residential treatment settings, among others. ACP policy recognizes that institutions have a duty to ensure the safety of their employees and must develop and implement policies, plans, and protocols to assess, report, reduce, and prevent workplace hazards and violence. The bill would also direct covered entities to provide in-person training and education to employees. ACP believes physicians and other health care workers should educate themselves on workplace violence policies, plans, and protocols; be aware of potential hazards; report all incidents of workplace violence; participate in workplace violence prevention and response trainings; and commit to upholding a culture of workplace safety.

Conclusion

Thank you for your leadership in helping to address this growing crisis that is impacting physicians and frontline health care workers across the nation. ACP looks forward to working with you to help expedite passage of S. 4182 or its companion bill, H.R. 1195, which has already passed the U.S. House of Representatives, and appreciates your commitment to protecting physicians and frontline health care workers as we continue to care for patients both during and after the pandemic. If the College can serve as a resource on this issue or any other issue

impacting health care delivery, please do not hesitate to contact Jonni McCrann at (202) 261-4541 or at jmccrann@acponline.org.

Sincerely,



Ryan Mire, MD, FACP
President

CC:

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
The Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions

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-impushed-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-tt20210106-u5praqcvuueptp3xi2n2yo4wf4-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-healthpowers-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-speaksout-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-isunacceptable>

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