ED & WORKFORCE DEMOCRATS

FACT SHEET

House Committee on Education and the Workforce
Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act

Our nation's caregivers – including nurses, social workers, and many others who dedicate their lives to caring for those in need – suffer workplace violence injuries at far higher rates than any other profession. In 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that health care workers make up for more than **three quarters** of all workplace violence nationwide, and are **almost four times** more likely to suffer a serious injury from workplace violence than workers in any other workplace setting.

Public employees, such as caregivers in state and local government health care and social service work, suffer particularly high rates of workplace violence. In 2017, state government health care and social service workers were almost **nine times more likely** to be injured by an assault than private-sector health care workers. Workplace violence often causes both physical and emotional harm. Victims of these incidents often suffer career-ending post-traumatic stress disorders that take away their livelihoods and weaken an already stretched health care workforce.

The Problem: *The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has the authority and responsibility to protect America's caregivers from workplace violence, but it has not been given the basic tools to fulfill its mission. Unless Congress takes action, it will be years, if not decades before this challenge is adequately addressed.*

- There is currently no OSHA standard that requires employers to implement violence prevention plans that would help reduce workplace violence injuries among health care and social service workers. The lack of an enforceable standard means that OSHA, the federal agency created to protect workers' safety, has few meaningful tools to protect health care workers from the threat of workplace violence.
- Unless Congress intervenes, it is highly unlikely there will be any action taken to protect health care workers in the next decade. The Government Accountability Office estimated, conservatively, that it takes OSHA **at least 7 years to issue a standard**. Two of the most significant OSHA standards issued in recent history – crystalline silica and beryllium -- which cause irreversible lung disease—each took OSHA **20 years to finalize**.
- The Trump administration relegated this standard to the back burner and made no progress on it in 4 years while nurses report that workplace violence in health care has gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Solution: *The Workplace Violeance Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act would provide health and social service workers the protection they deserve by:*

- Compelling OSHA to issue an interim final standard in one year and a final standard within 42 months requiring employers within the health care and social service sectors to develop and implement a workplace violence prevention plan.
- Identifying risks, specify solutions, and require training, reporting, and incident investigations. It would also provide protections from retaliation for reporting violent incidents.
- Protecting public sector health care and social service workers in the 24 states not covered by OSHA protections.