May 13, 2019

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing nurses, social workers, psychiatric, home health and personal care aides, as well as other workers in the healthcare and social service industries, we urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 1309, the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act. When healthcare and social service professionals show up to work, they shouldn't have to worry about whether they are going to be injured in an assault. The many professionals who face risk of assault every day include not only those working in hospitals, clinics and mental health facilities, but also those providing services in patients' homes, and outside the four walls of an office.

Healthcare and social service workers are nearly five times more likely to be assaulted than other workers, and the violence is growing. Between 2007 and 2017, the rate of violent injuries grew by 123 percent in hospitals, 201 percent in psychiatric hospitals and substance use treatment facilities, and 28 percent in social service settings. The costs of this violence are high: in injury rates, in professionals being driven from doing the work they love, and in workers' compensation claims and staff shortages.

Currently, there is no federally enforceable violence prevention standard specifically covering healthcare and social services, and federal guidelines do not cover those working in public facilities. H.R. 1309 would require hospitals, residential treatment facilities, clinics at correctional or detention facilities, substance use disorder treatment centers, and other service facilities to develop and implement comprehensive violence prevention plans and provide whistleblower protections for workers. We hear from members about violence all the time: a nurse choked to the point of unconsciousness; a case manager who has suffered bone fractures and debilitating brain injuries from being thrown against walls and floors; social workers brutally attacked, and even killed, when conducting visits to client homes.

No one should face violence, intimidation, or fear for their safety while working to help others and save lives. Violence is not just "part of the job," and studies show that prevention plans work. Many violent incidents can be predicted and minimized with the right staffing, policies and protocols; and this legislation builds upon well-established guidelines from the Department of Labor.

This bill is essential to making healthcare and social service settings safer for workers, but also safer healing environments for patients. When a patient harms a social worker or other clinician, it is traumatizing not only for the clinician but also for the patient; and it sets treatment back for months, if not years. Patients witnessing violence also are traumatized.

We urge you to support the nurses, social workers and other healthcare and social service professionals in your district by co-sponsoring H.R. 1309 and helping to move the bill toward a markup and passage.

Alliance for Retired Americans

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Counseling Association

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

American Federation of Teachers

American Public Health Association

Coalition of Labor Union Women of Southwestern PA

Communications Workers of America

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

Midstate Education and Service Foundation

NACBHDD (National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors)

NARMH (National Association of Rural Mental Health)

National Association of Social Workers

National Council for Occupational Safety and Health

PhilaPOSH (Philadelphia Area Project on Occupational Safety and Health)

RICOSH (Rhode Island Committee on Occupational Safety and Health)

School Social Work Association of America

Service Employees International Union

Smart Transportation

United Steelworkers

Worksafe