

MNA legislation provides real solutions for violence against RNs and healthcare workers

Improving workplace safety is one of MNA’s legislative priorities, as set by our member-leaders.

All nurses know that violence by patients, families and visitors is a growing problem. No one should have to suffer assault and harassment while taking care of patients, but it happens far too often.

The work that nurses do to improve conditions in their workplaces through collective action and strong contracts is essential. Nurses also deserve laws that protect them, too.

One approach is to enhance criminal penalties for assaulting a healthcare worker (Michigan Senate Bill 33). But there’s a much better way to truly make nurses safer from workplace violence.

That’s why MNA worked with legislators to introduce Michigan House Bill 5623/SB 890, a comprehensive, preventative approach to protecting nurses and healthcare workers.

Here’s a comparison of the two bills:

	SB 33	HB 5623/SB 890
	Sponsor: Sen. Ken Horn (R-Frankenmuth)	Sponsor: Rep. Gary Glenn (R-Williams Township); Sen. Joe Hune (R-Fowlerville)
Main points	Adds a small group of workers to an existing law enhancing criminal penalties for assault of workers doing their jobs.	Requires hospitals, public health departments and agencies to have a workplace violence prevention plan in place, track and report assaults, and take action to support workers who are assaulted.
Approach	Reactive	Proactive
Who is covered?	ED, trauma center, and OR personnel only	All workers in a healthcare setting
What settings are covered?	ED, trauma center and OR only	Almost all practice settings
Employer responsibility	None, except to post a sign*	Create a workplace violence prevention plan with input from direct-care employees that considers various risk factors and spells out procedures and resources for workers; Track assaults; Report assaults to local law enforcement; Cannot require employees to display last name on ID tag.
Who carries the burden?	The worker	The employer
Reporting and transparency?	No	Employer must track and post assaults
Exception for special populations?	No	Prevention methods and police reporting take into consideration assaults by patients without conscious intention, such as those with dementia or psychosis.

*MNA worked to change the original bill to require employers to post a sign stating it is a felony to assault designated individuals while doing their job.

While nurses certainly deserve to be protected under the law just like these other groups, the fact is that assault is already a crime. Yet when nurses are assaulted, they rarely see prosecution, if appropriate. That is why hospitals should be responsible for reducing the risk and providing nurses the resources that they need to recover.

What nurses really need is a law that forces employers to create conditions and processes that prevent violence against workers and address it when it does happen. Employers can, and must, step up, and this bill aims to make them do that. ■