

January 30, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Leader Schumer, Leader Jeffries, and Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the American Nurses Association (ANA), we want to formally recognize the commencement of the 118th Congress. A new Congress brings new opportunities, and ANA looks forward to working with Congressional Leadership to enact innovative, bipartisan policy solutions that advance the nursing profession and the patients we serve.

ANA is the premier organization representing the interests of the nation's 4.4 million registered nurses (RNs), through its constituent and state nurses associations, organizational affiliates, and individual members. RNs serve in multiple direct care, care coordination, and administrative leadership roles, across the full spectrum of health care settings. RNs provide and coordinate patient care, educate patients and the public about various health conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their family members. ANA members also include those practicing in the four advanced registered nurse (APRN) roles: nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse-midwives, and certified registered nurse anesthetists. ANA is dedicated to partnering with health care consumers to improve practices, policies, delivery models, outcomes, and access across the health care continuum. ANA's new President of the Board of Directors, Dr. Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, will continue work to address some of the most pressing issues facing nurses: staffing and workforce, health equity, the health and well-being of nurses, and full practice authority for APRNs.

As the nation continues to navigate challenges stemming from and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans are hearing reports about nurses quitting their jobs, retiring early, or leaving the profession altogether—leading the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to estimate the need for at least 1.1 million RNs to meet the demands of the health care delivery system. The problem will continue to worsen unless meaningful action is taken to place more value on RNs and improve their work environments.

The pandemic did not create the root issues causing nurses to leave the workforce—they are decades in the making. Staffing shortages, workplace violence, mandatory overtime, and other factors contribute to “burnout” among nurses, leading to frustration and departure from clinical settings. To begin addressing many of these critical issues, Congress should consider several impactful legislative proposals.

Ensuring Safe Health Care Workplaces

The issues that lead to burnout are persistent, and a major factor is increasing incidences of workplace violence. Seventy five percent of the nearly 25,000 workplace assaults reported annually occurred in health care and social services settings¹. This is a problem that affects all settings of care across the country, directly impacting nurses and health care workers, and threatening critical access to care for patients. Beyond the impact on nurses, workplace violence costs the United States \$151 billion per year, with an average of \$250,000 per incident. These figures do not capture hidden costs of workplace violence-related incidents, such as emotional pain, depression, isolation, and anxiety.²

It is incumbent on Congress to protect nurses and acknowledge the key role employers play in minimizing the risk of violence on-site. Adequate prevention includes safety protocols, physical barriers, and security measures to protect staff; and engaging community stakeholders on the importance of recognizing and addressing workplace violence against health care workers. Everyone deserves a safe workplace, and our health care workforce deserves nothing less than a zero-tolerance policy for workplace violence.

The *Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act* (S.4182/H.R. 1195 in the 117th Congress) would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to develop and enforce specific standards for health care and social service employers that will hold them accountable for protecting their employees from workplace violence. This issue has been a long-standing concern prior to the pandemic and acute increases in workplace violence have illustrated why passage of this legislation is so critical. This legislation passed in the House during the 117th Congress with significant bipartisan support. ANA urges Congress to ensure this vital legislation becomes law.

Improving Patient Access to Quality Care

APRNs provide high-quality, affordable health care across the health care system. APRNs, who have advanced degrees and extensive clinical training, are frequently a source of primary and maternal health care in areas where access to physicians is limited, particularly in medically underserved urban and rural areas. Through the use of federal and state waivers during the COVID-19 public health emergency, patients have benefited from APRNs being permitted to practice to the full extent of their clinical training and education. However, once the public health emergency is lifted, suddenly APRNs will not be able to continue practicing to their full extent to the detriment of patients. As a nation, we cannot afford to go backward. **The *Improving Care and Access to Nurses (ICAN Act)* (S.5212/H.R. 8812 in the 117th Congress) would permanently remove barriers to care and increase access to high-quality services provided by APRNs under the Medicare and Medicaid programs.**

¹ <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/osha3148.pdf>

² <https://www.securityindustry.org/2017/11/21/mitigating-risk-workplace-violence-health-care-settings/>

Strengthening the Nursing Workforce

Enhancing nursing education to respond to the current and future needs of the nursing workforce is a critical step towards solving the nursing shortage. A diverse, well-prepared and adequately supported nursing workforce is critical now and in the event of any future public health emergencies to ensure all patients have access to needed services. The nursing shortage harms not only nurses, but patients as well, as studies show quality care decreases when nurses are stretched too thin. **The *Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act (S.246/H.R. 851 in the 117th Congress)* would support nursing educational programs to grow, teach, and strengthen the future workforce of nurses.**

On behalf of the nation's nurses, I encourage you to pass bipartisan, comprehensive legislation that will provide robust protections and resources for our nation's health care providers. ANA looks forward to opportunities to work together over the next two years and we stand ready to serve as a resource. Please contact Tim Nanof, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs at (301) 628-5081 or Tim.Nanof@ana.org with any questions.

Sincerely,



Debbie Hatmaker, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chief Nursing Officer / EVP

cc: Senate Finance Committee Chairman and Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee Chairman and Ranking Member
House Ways & Means Committee Chairman & Ranking Member
House Energy & Commerce Committee Chairwoman & Ranking Member
House Education & Labor Committee Chairman & Ranking Member
Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, ANA President
Loressa Cole, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, ANA Chief Executive Officer