

# A Nurse is **NOT** a Punching Bag!

**SB 1753/HB 1696** - An Act Relative to Assault and Battery on Health Care Providers

## The Problem

A hospital should be a haven where patients go to heal and nurses and other health care professionals provide care in a safe environment. Unfortunately, hospitals are increasingly violent workplaces, both for employees and for patients. Violence against nurses and other health care workers, which can range from verbal and emotional abuse to physical assault and homicide, is not uncommon in hospitals and other health care settings. This violence can be perpetrated by patients, families, friends, visitors, and even co-workers.



### The statistics are sobering:

- 48% of all non-fatal assaults in the U.S. workplace are committed by health care patients.<sup>1</sup>
- Nurses and other personal care workers suffer violent assaults at a rate 12 times higher than other industries.<sup>2</sup>
- In a 2004 survey of Massachusetts nurses, 50% indicated they had been punched at least once in the last two years, and 25-30% were regularly pinched, scratched, spit on or had their hand/wrist twisted.<sup>3</sup>
- Between May 2006 and May 2007, there were over 1,000 phone calls to 911 from *inside* Brockton Hospital. That is over three emergency calls *per day*.

## One Part of the Solution

Patients, family members and others must get the message that violence against nurses will be treated seriously. Several years ago, the legislature increased the penalties for assaulting an emergency medical technician while providing treatment. **SB 1753 (M. Moore) and HB 1696 (Rodrigues) would provide the same increased penalties for those who assault a nurse providing treatment.**

### Listen to the voices of nurses on the job:

- "I had a client from the Department of Correction who took a harmonica and fashioned it into a weapon similar to a straight edge razor. It was discovered when the client became assaultive, throwing a 6 ft. dresser at a social worker and myself and then attempting to physically assault both of us. Luckily, no one was hurt. No charges were filed." - *Karen Coughlin, RN, Taunton State Hospital*
- "The patient exploded off the bottom of the stretcher where I was. I had started to back out into the hall when he landed on top of me and began screaming and smashing his fist into my head and neck. It took several minutes and an injection to get him to let go of me. He was restrained, the police were called and he was arrested, but I later learned that he was only charged with drug violations, not with assaulting me." - *Patricia Duggan, RN*

<sup>1</sup> "Violence in the Workplace 1997," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, [www.cdc.gov/niosh/violofs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violofs.html)

<sup>2</sup> "Guidelines for Preventing Workplace violence for Health Care & Social Service Workers," U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA 3148-01R 2004, [www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3148.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3148.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> "Protecting our Caregivers from Workplace Violence," Norfolk District Attorney's Office, 2007, p. 8

For more information about SB 1753/HB 1696, call Andi Mullin at the Massachusetts Nurses Association at 781/830-5716.