



# Legislative Update

## Lawmakers take steps to protect nurses from workplace violence

**F**or nurses and other health care workers, the risk of violent incidents is increasingly becoming part of the job. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), health care workers experience workplace violence at rates five to 12 times higher than workers overall. Around one in four nurses will be physically attacked each year. According to some research, more than 70 percent will face threats and harassment on the job. While many incidents go unreported, we know that violence and harassment are problems for health care workers at all types of facilities statewide.

Thankfully, Pennsylvania lawmakers are taking steps to protect dedicated health care professionals like you. This summer, Rep. Alex Charlton (R-Delaware County) introduced House Bill 1658, “The Healthcare Facilities Violence Prevention Act.” The purpose of this legislation is to establish committees in the workplace to make recommendations on preventing violence, properly responding to violent incidents, and improving overall safety for health care employees and other patients.

Committees would be charged with assessing the risk of workplace violence at the facility; reviewing cases of workplace violence; and developing a violence prevention plan.

The facility would be required to implement the violence prevention plan, and could face



penalties if the employer fails to comply. All factors that may put an employee at risk of workplace violence would be assessed by the committee including (but not limited to) working in high-crime areas, working late at night or early in the morning, inadequate lighting, uncontrolled public access, insufficient employee training, staffing levels, etc.

At least 50 percent of the committee membership will be direct caregivers, the majority of which will be licensed nurses. The remaining members of the committee will be representatives from management and people with experience or expertise relevant to violence prevention.

If a violent incident occurs, the committee designates a senior member to develop and support an in-house crisis response team for an employee who is a victim of

workplace violence.

This is an important proactive step to protect nurses from workplace violence. Contact your state legislators and ask them to support HB 1658!

The PA House of Representatives took another important step in support of nurses by approving House Bill 646. Rep. Judy Ward, a registered nurse from Blair County, sponsored the bill that would add nurses and all health care practitioners to a protected class in the event of assault. HB 646 would raise the penalty for an assault on a health care practitioner, while in the performance of duty where there is bodily injury, from a misdemeanor of the second degree to a felony of the second degree.

House Bill 646 now goes on to the PA Senate for consideration.

## News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals (cont. from Page 1)

professionalism that they put into their work and their devotion to the nursing profession,” said Bonnie Neiman, PSEA Midwestern Region UniServ who works with the BCNA.

PSEA congratulates the members of the Bucks County Nurses Association and the Neshaminy Manor Long Term Care Facility for these well-deserved accolades.

### Highlands Hospital Nurses Association and Lab Technicians

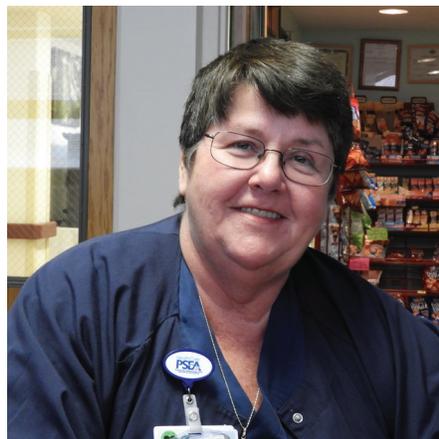
Highlands Hospital nurse and PSEA member Charlotte Keller, RN, recently celebrated 40 years of service at the Connellsville community hospital. Charlotte began working at Highlands Hospital in March 1977. She attended the Uniontown Hospital nursing school, after which she obtained her bachelor’s degree in nursing from Penn State, and her Masters of Education, Nursing, from California State University. Keller is a lifelong resident of Fayette County, and feels deeply rooted in the community.

“My mother also worked at Highlands for 15 years before I began working there. So, from the moment I started at Highlands, people there knew who I was, and accepted me as family. It has been that way ever since,” Keller said.

We asked Keller about her commitment to the community hospital. She told us that through all the tragedies that she has seen over her time at Highlands, one thing continues to resonate – the hospital and the community are deeply connected, and they need each other.

“Our philosophy is to be a family and community-oriented facility. We take pride in being able to take great care of our patients. We see them at church, at the store, and out in our neighborhoods. We often can continue our care and reinforce our commitment to our patients when we see them out and about. We are always on duty,” Keller said.

When asked what advice she would give to new nurses and health care providers, she told us this: “Never think you know everything; you learn something new every day. Don’t ever assume that your education stops when you finish school. You have to be open to learning new ways to care for your patients every day.”



*Charlotte Keller*

Although Keller has already worked for more than 40 years at Highlands, she has no plans to retire – yet.

She laughed when she told us, “I plan to be here for at least another five years. I have never doubted my decision to enter the nursing profession. It has made my life very special.”

Keller also wanted to be sure to tell anyone thinking about going into nursing or patient care to not be afraid – just do it!

“I have been very fortunate to work in a field where I can truly help people every day,” she said. “There is nothing more important than that.”

Highlands Secretary-Treasurer Tammy Guth noted that there are two other Highlands PSEA members who have more than 30 years of service – Dawn Toth, RN, and Jim Olson, Lab Tech.

“Our very experienced members are dedicated to their union and to our small, hometown hospital,” Guth said.

We will feature stories about Toth and Olsen in future issues of this newsletter.

### Indiana Registered Nurses Association

It’s been a busy spring and early summer for the nurses of the Indiana Registered Nurses Association at the Indiana Regional Medical Center, to say the least.

Several dozen nurses gathered to receive training and encouragement on standing up to bullying physicians and management.

They learned how to recognize the signs of being abused, techniques for how to handle immediate situations, and how to follow procedures to file charges and complaints against repeat offenders.

Since then, in addition to doing so, nurses have also begun to track and report work overloads, which will help push back against understaffing, inadequate work conditions, and even against unnecessary or excess discipline.

Additionally, several arbitrations are moving forward, helping to hold the hospital accountable for unjust

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## News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals (cont. from Page 3)

termination, excess discipline, and more.

As is always a good idea statewide, nurses at Indiana continue to monitor the medical center's performance for signs of possible increased collaboration with larger medical systems.

Finally, the executive leadership of the local now includes newcomers Lisa Traister as secretary, along with new grievance co-chairs Karen Blystone and Karen Sturgeon.

### Somerset Professional Nurses Association

A very successful bargaining season led to a strong new contract for the nurses of the Somerset Professional Nurses Association

who work for Somerset Hospital and related outside services. It runs through March 2020.

Among the highlights:

- Salary raises averaging 7 percent
- Maintained three health plans with the same HSA/QHDHP contributions
- Major new improved in-house pharmacy program
- Substantially improved vacation rules for accrual, availability, use, etc.
- Maintained current retirement contributions by hospital
- For the first time, fair-share fee payers will make their payments to the union.

In related news, in June, the hospital and union reached

agreement on a related plan to bring in new LPNs to work at the hospital for the first time in many years. The pay scale was updated to reflect improved starting salaries to bring in the best available LPNs in the region to Somerset Hospital.

Also in June, members voted for a new team of leaders after President Sandi Zubek opted not to seek another term as local president. Starting Sept. 1, Bill Carnell will be president, with Casey Brown as vice-president, Lori Saylor as treasurer, and Kristin Yoder as secretary.

Finally, the hospital and union agreed to bonus recruitment payments to attract the best applicants for vacant RN positions at Somerset Hospital.