



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## SENATE ACTS TO PROTECT NURSES FROM VIOLENCE; Legislation Raises Assault Penalty to Class C or D

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS January 26, 2010

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State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D/WF – 35th District) announced today that the Senate approved legislation strengthening the penalties for individuals who injure or attempt to injure nurses while on duty. The bill renders penalty for assault on registered nurses (RN) and licensed practical nurses (LPN) a class C or D felony.

This bill recognizes the important service to the public provided by RNs and LPNs, who suffer the highest proportions of injuries than any healthcare workers, by providing them with the same protections other first responders now have. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nearly 500,000 nurses each year become victims of violent crimes in the workplace. Most commonly reported acts of violence reported include spitting, biting, hitting and shoving. Threats of violence are an even more common occurrence.

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, "Workplace safety for emergency medical professionals, including registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, should absolutely be an established standard. Protection from violence and abuse is a very important component for increasing recruitment and retention of vital professionals in the health care field."

The incidence of assault is exacerbated by the fact that many hospitals across New York are often understaffed due to the shortage, leading many nurses to work in isolation with patients who may be suffering from mental illness or substance abuse, making violent behavior more likely.

"I was pleased to support this important bill, as we must continue to do our utmost to address the shortage of nurses in our workforce and to protect their health and safety," Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins concluded.