

2026

**AAOHN
NATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

Legislative Affairs Advocacy Update & Practice Exchange

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Today's Discussion Agenda

- What is Advocacy?
- How can I advocate for occupational and environmental health?
- What are some of AAOHN's recent advocacy efforts?
- AAOHN occupational health advocacy – past, present and future

What is Advocacy?

Presented by:

Lisa Bultman, BSN, RN, Clinical Manager
Occupational Health and Wellness, Owens
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Nursing Advocacy



Nursing advocacy is the practice of nurses using their expertise and influence to protect patient rights, improve healthcare outcomes, and shape health policy.

Involves supporting patients/*workers*, communities/*workplaces*, and the **nursing profession** by ensuring that healthcare decisions prioritize safety, quality, and equity.

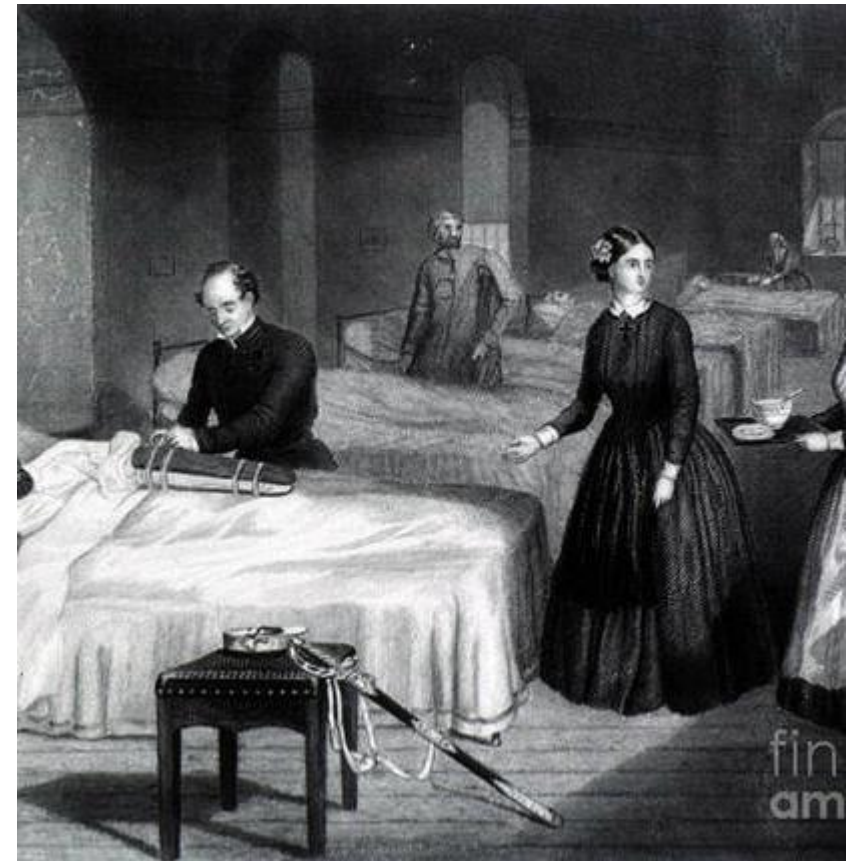
Advocacy in Occupational Health

1888: A Pennsylvania coal company hired Betty Moulder, RN, to care for workers and their families; this was the early practice of occupational health nursing case management.

1895: The Vermont Marble Company hired Ada Mayo Stewart, RN, to provide nursing services to employees and their families as well as community residents who could not afford private health care.

1897: The Benefit Association of the John Wanamaker Company of New York hired a nurse to visit the sick and see that funds were distributed fairly. (Anne B. Duncan)

[AAOHN History Timeline.pdf](#)





The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

146 garment workers died

123 women and girls, 23 men

Death resulted from either the fire, smoke inhalation, or falling or jumping from the 8th, 9th and 10th floors .

Most of the victims were recent Italian or Jewish immigrants aged **14 to 23**.

The doors to the stairwells and exits were locked “common practice” to prevent workers from taking unauthorized breaks and to reduce theft.

Many of the workers could not escape from the burning building and jumped from the high windows.

There were no sprinklers in the building.



Kansas City Popcorn Lung Disease

In **2000**, a physician reported that eight former microwave-popcorn factory workers had developed a rare and disabling lung disease, **bronchiolitis obliterans (BO)**.

Disease results in obstruction of the smallest airways of the bronchioles from inflammation.

Symptoms: dry cough, SOB, wheezing and feeling tired

The chemical is diacetyl and is found in many household products.

The EU has banned e-liquids in vaping.

Manufacturers of vaping devices use diacetyl to give flavor and sweet smell.

How can I advocate for occupational and environmental health?

Presented by:

Donna Zankowski, MPH, RN, FAAOHN, AAOHN
Legislative Affairs Chairperson

AAOHN & Advocacy

It is now more important than ever for AAOHN & individual members to advocate for the occupational & environmental health nursing profession.

The Five Conversations Your Legislators Want to Have



- 1. What is the Local Impact of an issue**
- 2. Real-Life Stories that shed light on the issue**
- 3. What Legislative Action will make you happy**
- 4. How is Money r/t this issue being Spent where you live**
- 5. Who Do You Know – what are your connections to the community**

Adapted from The One-Hour Activist by Christopher Kush. 2004. Illustration 2.1.

How to Make Contact

- Visit **USA.GOV** to find your elected officials: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>
- **By Phone** – ask to speak to the **Legislator** or **Legislative Assistant** in charge of your issue. It is ok to leave a message or ask for a call-back.
- **In Person** – schedule a meeting with the Legislator or Legislative Assistant in charge of your issue (can be in D.C. or a district office).
- **By Email** – send your composed letter or comment

What Are You Asking For?

- **Know your Issue** - as much as possible
- **Know what you are asking for (your “ask”)** – what do you want the Legislator to do?
- **Prepare a Personal Story to tell** – what does this issue mean to you
- **Create a one-page explanation of your position on the issue** - (which can be emailed or given in person)
- **Be prepared to continue the conversation** – i.e., follow-up, establish a relationship

How To Write Your One-Pager

1. **Introduction** – inform about the problem in an interesting way (what is your hook?)
2. **Blame** – what are the causes of the problem (can be multiple)
3. **Solutions** – what is your general thesis
 - A. Specific solution – expand on your general thesis
 - B. Specific solution
 - C. Specific solution
4. **Call to Action** – what steps must be taken (be specific)
5. **Conclusion** – can also reiterate the consequences of failing to act

Writing Comments for the Federal Register

“Make a difference. Submit your comments and let your voice be heard.”

<https://www.regulations.gov/>

- This link allows you to follow, read comments, and make comments on proposed changes to regulations and Requests for Information (RFI) of the EPA, Department of Labor, OSHA, HHS, CDC, NIOSH, etc.
- The principles for writing comments for the Federal Register, and a **letter to the Editor** are the same as for writing a one-pager

Tips for Social Media

Be Aware of:

- ❖ HIPPA, and a patient's right to privacy in health care, and people's right to privacy in general
- ❖ Your Employer's Code of Conduct/Ethics and social media policy
- ❖ Unless you are representing your employer/organization, separate the personal & professional
- ❖ Federal Employees should understand the Hatch Act: <https://osc.gov/Services/Pages/HatchAct-FAQ.aspx>
- ❖ Protect Your Privacy – check your settings (consider a personal data removal service)
- ❖ Assume everything you put on social media is public and searchable!
- ❖ Be cautious of posts that do not seem legitimate or advocate violence, block when necessary
- ❖ Remember to think & do due diligence before you post or re-post!

What are some of AAOHN's recent advocacy efforts?

Presented by:

William Thomack BSN, RN, COHN-S, FAAOHN,
AAOHN Board Member & Liaison

Proposed Rule Change by Department of Education

1/30/2026, Department of Education proposed rule change to 34 CFR Parts 674, 682, and 685

Proposed to Amend Federal Student Loan Programs authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act

Part of the OBBB Signed by President Trump on 7/4/2025 directing the Department to implement roughly a dozen provisions by July 1st, 2026

Changes for Nursing

The rule changes the description of a professional to Pharmacy (Pharm. D.), Dentistry (D.D.S. or DMD), Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Chiropractic (D.C. or DCM), Law (LLB or J.D.), Medicine (M.D.), Optometry (O.D.), Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.), Podiatry (D.P.M. or Pod.D.), Theology (M.Div. or M.H.L.) and Clinical Psychology (Psy.D. or Ph.D.)

Nursing is not included

AAOHN Response

- 1/11/2026: AAOHN signed onto several letters from Senator Merkley's (Oregon) office
- 2/17/2026: Comment from AAOHN entered into the Docket
- 2/23/2026: AAOHN signed onto Nursing Community Coalition letter
- Public Comment period has closed
- Still waiting on further information
- RNAction.org

Respiratory Protection

7/1/2025: Proposed rule change to 29 CFR 1910

Change would remove the medical evaluation for filtering facepiece respirators and loose-fitting powered air-filtering respirators.

Comments were open until 11/1/2025

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/01/2025-12235/amending-the-medical-evaluation-requirements-in-the-respiratory-protection-standard-for-certain>

AAOHN Response

- Volunteers of Legislative Committee drafted comments
- Posted comments to Docket
 - Lack of large-scale epidemiologic studies to support
 - Nursing experience with prohibitive medical conditions
 - <https://www.regulations.gov/document/OSHA-2025-0006-0013/comment>
- No news on public forums as of January 2026

AAOHN occupational health advocacy – past, present and future

Presented by:

Jill Byers, RN, MSN, Field Manager, Medical and
Employee Health, BNSF Railway

Past, Present and Future

- So many things we take for granted are from nurse advocacy.
Needle stick prevention, respirator standards, lifting standards.
- Some topics seem to get stuck.
- But we just keep going and trying.
- We follow the legislation and advocate.
- One piece of legislation we follow has been stuck since 2017.
Healthcare Workplace Violence.

Healthcare Workplace Violence

- NIOSH [Violence Occupational Hazards in Hospitals | NIOSH | CDC](#)
- Research is mostly from the early 1990s. Gives guidelines and suggestions. Not an OSHA standard.
- [Healthcare - Workplace Violence | Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)
- OSHA has information but not standards and often references Workplace Violence Safety and Health Topics. [Workplace Violence Safety and Health Topics Page](#)

Violence Prevention for Health Care Workers



2017 [H.R.7141](#) — 115th Congress (2017-2018) Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act Sponsor: [Courtney, Joe \[Rep.-D-CT-2\]](#)

2019 [H.R.1309](#) — 116th Congress (2019-2020) Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act Sponsor: [Courtney, Joe \[Rep.-D-CT-2\]](#)

2021 [H.R.1195](#) — 117th Congress (2021-2022) Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act Sponsor: [Courtney, Joe \[Rep.-D-CT-2\]](#)

2023 [H.R.2663](#) — 118th Congress (2023-2024) Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act Sponsor: [Courtney, Joe \[Rep.-D-CT-2\]](#)

2025 [H.R.2531](#) — 119th Congress (2025-2026) Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act Sponsor: [Courtney, Joe \[Rep.-D-CT-2\]](#)

[H.R.2531 - 119th Congress \(2025-2026\): Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)

Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act

119th Congress 1st Session

H.R. 2531

To direct the Secretary of Labor to issue an occupational safety and health standard that requires covered employers within the health care and social service industries to develop and implement a comprehensive workplace violence prevention plan, and for other purposes.

Where do we go from here? What can we do?

- Keep up on the important legislation.
- Offer research and expert testimony.
- Stay involved with our organizations that advocate for us.
- Communicate with your legislators.
- Stay involved in your nursing community to understand the various areas impacted.
- Understand that sometimes we aren't going to get the win we fight for.
- Join a committee.
- Run for office.

Any questions?

“I always wondered why somebody didn’t do something about that, then I realized, I was somebody”

Lily Tomlin