



MEDIA ALERT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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N.J. Nurses Advocate on Capitol Hill for Gun Violence Study

Other Bills Addressed: Safe Staffing, Workforce Funding, Medicare Reform & Veterans' Care

WASHINGTON, D.C.—June 24, 2016—Representatives from the New Jersey State Nurses Association (NJSNA) were advocating yesterday on Capitol Hill for a gun violence study, safe staffing, workforce development funding and access-to-care for veterans.

“We urged New Jersey lawmakers to work in a bipartisan effort to pass legislation to address the public health crisis regarding gun violence that is a concern of the national nursing community,” said Judith Schmidt, RN, MSN, ONC, CCRN and CEO of the New Jersey State Nurses Association. “As part of NJSNA’s mission and vision we are dedicated to both advocating for the profession of nursing and our patients. NJSNA nurses attend the annual American Nurses Association Lobby Day to meet with our Congressional representatives to discuss issues that affect nursing not only in New Jersey but across the nation.”

NJSNA members and 351 nurses from around the country urged elected officials to repeal language blocking the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from conducting gun violence research and appropriate funding to examine the causes and prevention strategies for gun violence. The request comes on the heels of a sit-in on the floor of the House by Democratic lawmakers advocating for stricter gun control measures.

“We’re on the other side of the gun violence coin,” said Dr. Benjamin Evans, president-elect of NJSNA, which advocates that gun violence is becoming a public health emergency. “The side from which we come is the public health issue. In the CDC regulations, there is a prohibition to collect epidemiological data and we are in support of the CDC being able to collect evidence. None of us go in and practice healthcare without supportive evidence.”

“You get the end result of this violence and you have to try and put lives back together and make sure people survive,” agreed U.S. Rep. Donald Payne, Jr. (D-10), during a meeting with NJSNA officials in his office after returning from spending the night on the House floor.

A CDC study would pinpoint where the public health issues from gun violence truly are, said Norma Rodgers, NJSNA president in her meeting with U.S. Rep. Cory Booker’s staff. Booker himself was unavailable because he was participating in the sit-in on the House floor.

“(Gun violence) is not just in the urban cities anymore,” Rodgers said. “The suburban cities and the rural areas are being impacted.”

Booker’s staff expressed his support for the study. “The more gun violence we have, the more you (nurses) are going to have to deal with on the back end,” said Ashley Eden, Booker’s senior education and health policy advisor. “It means a lot to us that you are lending your strong voice. When you come into town, people listen.”

Other legislation the nurses discussed with lawmakers included:

The Registered Nurse Safe Staffing Act

This bill would require Medicare participating hospitals to establish registered nurse staffing plans using a committee, which includes a majority of direct care nurses, to ensure patient safety, reduce readmissions and improve nurse retention.

“We all know staffing has to change,” Schmidt said. “The more patients a nurse is responsible for the greater the chance of an adverse event, such as a fall, infection or even an error. It’s not a numbers issue. They don’t take into consideration the patient’s acuity or the nurse’s experience. Should the newer nurse be responsible for the sickest patient(s) or the same number as a nurse that has many years of experience?”

Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development

These programs provide the largest source of federal funding for nursing education, offering financial support for nursing education programs, individual students, and nurses.

“A lot of nurses can’t afford to go back to school, which holds them back in career development or holds some back from a healthcare career altogether,” said Schmidt about the grant that funds up to 85 percent of a nurse’s tuition for advancing their education. “Instead of walking out of Rutgers, for example, with \$100,000 in student loans, they are walking out with a \$15,000 loan.”

Medicare Reform

Proposed bipartisan legislation would amend the Medicare law to allow advanced registered practice nurses (APRNs) – a group that includes nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and certified nurse midwives – to sign home health plans of care and certify Medicare patients for the home health benefit.

Under current Medicare laws, APRNs are prohibited from signing home health plans of care and certifying Medicare patients for the home health benefit, which results in more Medicare dollars being spent due to red tape and delays waiting for a physician.

A five-year estimate projects \$82.5 million in savings to Medicare, and \$252.6 million in savings in 10 years.

Improving Veterans Access to Quality Healthcare Act of 2015

This bill allows Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) who work in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities “full practice authority.” Full practice authority means allowing APRNs to practice to the full extent of their education and training and provides a common-sense solution to the challenges associated with ensuring America’s veterans have access to high-quality, healthcare services.

“Veterans deserve the best care and allowing APRN’s full practice authority would alleviate some of the backlog of care and minimize future delays to access to healthcare professionals for those who have served our great nation,” Schmidt said.

APRNs are advanced practice registered nurses who have completed formal graduate education leading at least to a master's degree in nursing, and increasingly to a doctor of nursing practice degree.

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About NJSNA

NJSNA, which was established in 1901, is a constituent member of the American Nurses Association. The New Jersey State Nurses Association (NJSNA) represents the interests of 125,000 registered nurses and advanced practice nurses as an advocate for the nursing profession. NJSNA's lobbying arm continues to protect the nursing profession through legislative victories. Its nonprofit foundation, Institute for Nursing, helps nurses further their careers by providing continuing education, scholarships and research grants in addition to invaluable networking opportunities. For more information, nurses can visit www.njsna.org or contact NJSNA at njsna@njsna.org or (609) 883-5335.



Dr. Benjamin Evans, president-elect of NJSNA (left) and Saundra Austin-Benn, NJSNA Board of Directors (right) met with U.S. Rep Donald Payne, Jr. (D-10) during the American Nurses Association Lobby Day to advocate for gun violence study, safe staffing, workforce development funding and access-to-care for veterans on June 23.



Members of NJSNA met with Ashley Eden, senior education and health policy advisor in U.S. Sen. Cory Booker's Capitol Hill office to advocate for gun violence study, safe staffing, workforce development funding and access-to-care for veterans on June 23.



L-R Front: Norma Rodgers, president, Dr. Benjamin Evans, president-elect and Judith Schmidt, CEO and New Jersey State Nurses Association members, (L-R Rear: Linda Gural, JoAnne Penn, Saundra Austin-Benn, Eleanor Dietrich-Withington and Dr. Kathleen Mullen) went to Capitol Hill on June 23 to advocate for gun violence study, safe staffing, workforce development funding and access-to-care for veterans.