



NEWS FROM
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'Whistleblower' Legislation Protects Both Health Care Workers and Patients

Imagine being a nurse committed to caring for others, only to witness a colleague mistreating a patient. Imagine starting your shift only to find a patient hungry, unattended, or without the medication they need to rest comfortably. Imagine nursing home residents complaining about the physical and emotional abuses they suffered since you last saw them. Then, imagine being torn between reporting these conditions and losing your job.

It is implicit that all health care workers' first concern is the health and safety of their patients, but if they fear repercussions from their employer, it's the patients who pay the price. That's why I sponsored the Assembly's Health Care Whistleblower Protection Act (A.3259) to prevent discrimination against workers who disclose information about the practices or policies of a hospital, clinic, or nursing home that could threaten public health or patient safety. Employers who violate the law could face fines up to \$2,000.

The Assembly passed this critically important measure to help reduce medical errors, improve patient care and ensure health care workers are not punished for protecting their patients. It has garnered a broad coalition of support from groups across New York State — from consumer advocacy to health professional associations. The New York State Nurses Association supports the legislation as an essential ingredient in improving the quality of health care services and restoring public confidence in the health care system.

I have worked to improve health care facilities, including supporting a budget that restores the governor's \$327 million in Medicaid cuts to nursing homes and home health services. The Assembly's budget also contains funding to help New York's hospitals recruit and retain qualified nurses and nurses' aides, as well as establishing new training initiatives for nursing home workers and a hotline for lodging complaints when offenses occur. These funds, coupled with our whistleblower measure, will keep patients safe and protect health care workers from the difficult task of choosing between their patients' lives and keeping their jobs.

Last year, the Senate followed the Assembly's lead by unanimously passing the Health Care Whistleblower Act. Unfortunately, the governor chose to kill the bill. I urge the Senate and the governor to join the Assembly this year and finally pass this significant legislation into law. In an age of managed care and nursing shortages, we must do all we can to protect the health and well-being of patients.