

California Legislature



May 8, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

We are writing to respectfully request increased support to help protect frontline nurses and healthcare workers as the state faces the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, COVID-19 has confronted our health care system with unprecedented challenges. While treating patients who have tested positive for COVID-19 healthcare workers place themselves and their families at great personal risk. As of May 5, 2020, local health departments in California have reported 6,167 confirmed positive COVID-19 cases in nurses and health care workers. 33 of those cases tragically resulted in death. These figures do not include the immeasurable number of asymptomatic nurses and health care workers who are currently working every day without sufficient personal protective equipment or priority testing.

Although COVID-19 is a global health crisis, it is quite clearly a personal tragedy for healthcare workers and their families. Nurses enter this vocation because they wish to care for the sick and vulnerable among us. We need to do more as a state to protect our nurses and other frontline healthcare workers, who run toward this danger every day, allowing Californian families to follow the direction to remain at home.

Unfortunately, in California, nurses and other workers providing direct patient care are not considered first responders, even though they perform critical lifesaving work and put themselves in harm's way. This is particularly evident during localized, national or global emergencies. As a state, we have and should continue to show support and care for traditionally considered first responders, such as firefighters, police and EMTs. Their contributions should never be downplayed. However, for decades, the predominantly female profession of nursing has been left without the designation or protections as predominantly male first responders. Let us glean from this crisis a broader sense of who comes rushing to the defense and protection of Californians in the midst of tragedy.

Frontline nurses treating patients with COVID-19 are likely exposed to the highest risk of infection because of their close, frequent contact with known and suspected positive patients and working longer hours than usual. In addition to the risk of physical harm from infections,

frontline health care workers who are directly involved in the diagnosis, treatment, and care of patients with COVID-19 are additionally at risk of developing psychological distress and other mental health symptoms. Because nurses and healthcare workers have significantly increased occupational exposure to COVID-19, we ask for your support of legislation to guarantee these workers with presumptions for PTSD, neck and back injuries, and infectious diseases, thereby guaranteeing them access to the workers' compensation system.

While most of us self-isolate from the safety of our homes, healthcare workers far too often face this battle without adequate infectious disease protections. Without proper PPE, this virus will spread even faster and impact our healthcare systems ability to respond. Even though the state has distributed 41.5 million N95 respirators, nurses have continued to witness difficulty in accessing PPE, which has had a deleterious impact on frontline healthcare workers, especially nurses. We are especially concerned with reports that nurses and healthcare workers are not being provided needed PPE when some hospitals have these resources at their disposal. We recognize that PPE resources need to be issued pursuant to CDC guidelines, but are concerned that some frontline healthcare workers are being prohibited from accessing these resources when they are in more plentiful supply. As such, we respectfully request you to empower the California Labor Agency, specifically Cal/OSHA and the Department of Labor Standards and Enforcement to ensure that California's hospitals are not unnecessarily precluding access to needed PPE and other needed medical resources, including ventilators, for nurses and frontline healthcare workers.

Finally, when healthcare workers return home, they should not be worried about exposing anyone in their household who is immunocompromised or elderly. We commend you for the work you have done on this and urge you to expand the availability of hotels for healthcare workers, including nurses. We stand ready to help you in this effort.

We are proud that California has some of the most protective and progressive workplace and health and safety laws. Workers need the full protections of labor, collective bargaining, and health and safety laws, and we stand with you in the enforcement of these protections.

We understand that these are unprecedented times placing significant challenges on all of us and we appreciate all that you have done during this time of crisis. Let us work together as this crisis unfolds to do even more to protect our frontline healthcare heroes.

Sincerely,



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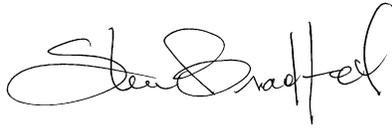
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