

106TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 137

To prohibit discrimination or retaliation against health care workers who report unsafe conditions and practices which impact on patient care.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 6, 1999

Mr. FOLEY (for himself, Mr. KLINK, Mr. SERRANO, Mr. SANDLIN, Ms. KILPATRICK, Ms. DELAURO, Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California, Mr. STARK, Mr. ABERCROMBIE, Mr. ACKERMAN, Mr. GEJDENSON, Mr. KILDEE, Mr. BALDACCI, Mr. EHRLICH, Mr. MASCARA, Mr. DOYLE, Mr. FILNER, Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD, Mr. KLECZKA, Mr. MARTINEZ, and Ms. WOOLSEY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To prohibit discrimination or retaliation against health care workers who report unsafe conditions and practices which impact on patient care.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Patient Safety and  
5 Health Care Whistleblower Protection Act of 1999”.

1 **SEC. 2. PROHIBITION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION OR RE-**  
2 **TALIATION.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—No person shall retaliate or dis-  
4 criminate in any manner against any health care worker  
5 because the worker (or any person acting on behalf of the  
6 worker) in good faith—

7 (1) engaged in any disclosure of information re-  
8 lating to the care, services, or conditions of a health  
9 care entity;

10 (2) advocated on behalf of a patient or patients  
11 with respect to the care, services, or conditions of a  
12 health care entity; or

13 (3) initiated, cooperated, or otherwise partici-  
14 pated in any investigation or proceeding of any gov-  
15 ernmental entity relating to the care, services, or  
16 conditions of a health care entity.

17 (b) ATTEMPTS.—No person shall retaliate or dis-  
18 criminate in any manner against any health care worker  
19 because the health care worker has attempted or has an  
20 intention to engage in an action described in subsection  
21 (a).

22 (c) RESTRICTIONS ON REPORTING PROHIBITED.—  
23 No person shall by contract, policy, or procedure prohibit  
24 or restrict any health care worker from engaging in any  
25 action for which a protection against discrimination or re-  
26 taliation is provided under subsection (a).

1 (d) CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.—This section  
 2 does not protect disclosures that would violate Federal or  
 3 State law or diminish or impair the rights of any person  
 4 to the continued protection of confidentiality of commu-  
 5 nications provided by State or Federal law.

6 (e) GOOD FAITH ACTION.—A health care worker with  
 7 respect to the conduct described in subsection (a)(1) shall  
 8 be considered to be acting in good faith if the health care  
 9 worker reasonably believes that—

10 (1) the information is true; and

11 (2) the information disclosed by the health care  
 12 worker—

13 (A) evidences a violation of any law, rule,  
 14 or regulation, or of a generally recognized pro-  
 15 fessional or clinical standard; or

16 (B) relates to care, services, or conditions  
 17 which potentially endangers one or more pa-  
 18 tients or workers or the public.

19 **SEC. 3. CONFIDENTIALITY OF COMPLAINTS TO GOVERN-**  
 20 **MENT AGENCIES.**

21 The identity of a health care worker who complains  
 22 in good faith to a government agency or department about  
 23 the quality of care, services, or conditions of a health care  
 24 entity shall remain confidential and shall not be disclosed  
 25 by any person except upon the knowing written consent

1 of the health care worker and except in the case in which  
2 there is imminent danger to health or public safety or an  
3 imminent violation of criminal law.

4 **SEC. 4. ENFORCEMENT.**

5 (a) PRIVATE CAUSE OF ACTION.—

6 (1) Any health care worker who believes that he  
7 or she has been retaliated or discriminated against  
8 in violation of section 2 may file a civil action in any  
9 Federal or State court of competent jurisdiction  
10 against the person believed to have violated section  
11 2.

12 (2) If the court determines that a violation of  
13 section 2 has occurred, the court shall award such  
14 damages which result from the unlawful act or acts,  
15 including compensatory damages, reinstatement, re-  
16 imbursement of any wages, salary, employment ben-  
17 efits, or other compensation denied or lost to such  
18 employee by reason of the violation, as well as puni-  
19 tive damages, attorneys' fees, and costs (including  
20 expert witness fees). The court shall award interest  
21 on the amount of damages awarded at the prevailing  
22 rate.

23 (3) The court may issue temporary, prelimi-  
24 nary, and permanent injunctive relief restraining  
25 violations of this law, including the restraint of any

1 withholding of the payment of wages, salary, employ-  
2 ment benefits, or other compensation, plus interest,  
3 found by the court to be due and the restraint of  
4 any other change in the terms and conditions of em-  
5 ployment and may award such other equitable relief  
6 as may be appropriate, including employment, rein-  
7 statement, and promotion.

8 (4) An action may be brought under this sub-  
9 section not later than 2 years after the date of the  
10 last event constituting the alleged violation for which  
11 the action is brought.

12 (b) CIVIL PENALTY.—Any person who violates a pro-  
13 vision of section 2 shall be subject to a civil penalty of  
14 not to exceed \$10,000 for each violation. In determining  
15 the amount of any penalty under this subsection, the ap-  
16 propriateness of such penalty to the size of the business  
17 of the person charged and the gravity of the violation shall  
18 be considered. The amount of any penalty under this sub-  
19 section, when finally determined, may be—

20 (1) deducted from any sums owing by the  
21 United States to the person charged; or

22 (2) ordered by the court, in an action brought  
23 for a violation of section 2 brought by the health  
24 care worker (or workers) who suffered retaliation or  
25 discrimination.

1 (c) CRIMINAL PENALTY.—Any person who willfully  
2 and repeatedly violates a provision of section 2 and such  
3 violation is related to—

4 (1) a pattern or practice of such violations,

5 (2) quality of care, services, or conditions which  
6 would likely lead to serious injury or death for pa-  
7 tients or health care workers, or

8 (3) retaliation against a health care worker  
9 which could lead to serious injury or death,

10 shall be fined in accordance with title 18, United States  
11 Code, imprisoned for not more than 1 year, or both.

12 **SEC. 5. BURDEN OF PROOF.**

13 (a) ON COMPLAINANT.—In any civil action brought  
14 under this Act, the complainant shall have the initial bur-  
15 den of making a prima facie showing that any behavior  
16 described in subsections (a) through (c) of section 2 was  
17 a contributing factor in the adverse action or inaction al-  
18 leged in the complaint. A prima facie case shall be estab-  
19 lished if the complainant can show that—

20 (1) the respondent knew of the complainant's  
21 protected activities at the time that the alleged unfa-  
22 vorable action or inaction was taken; and

23 (2) the discriminatory action occurred within a  
24 period of time such that a reasonable person could  
25 conclude that an activity protected by section 2(a) or

1        2(b) was a contributing factor in the discriminatory  
2        treatment.

3        (b) ON RESPONDENT.—Once the complainant estab-  
4        lishes a prima facie case, the burden shifts to the respond-  
5        ent to demonstrate, by clear and convincing evidence, that  
6        it would have taken the same adverse action or inaction  
7        in the absence of such behavior.

8        **SEC. 6. DEFINITIONS.**

9        For purposes of this Act:

10            (1) HEALTH CARE ENTITY.—The term “health  
11        care entity” includes a health care facility (such as  
12        a hospital, clinic, nursing facility, or other provider  
13        of health care services) or a health care carrier (such  
14        as an insurance plan or health maintenance organi-  
15        zation). Such term also includes those State, Fed-  
16        eral, or local agencies whose responsibilities include  
17        oversight of health care or health care entities.

18            (2) HEALTH CARE WORKER.—The term “health  
19        care worker” includes a worker directly employed by  
20        a health care entity as well as an employee of a sub-  
21        contractor or independent contractor that provides  
22        supplies or services to a health care entity. Such  
23        term also includes a nurse, nurse’s aide, laboratory  
24        technician, physician, intern, resident, clerical em-  
25        ployee, laundry staff, kitchen staff, maintenance

1 worker, and a current or former worker or contrac-  
2 tor.

3 (3) DISCRIMINATION OR RETALIATION.—The  
4 term “discrimination or retaliation” includes a  
5 threat, intimidation, or any adverse change in a  
6 health care worker’s wages, benefits, or terms or  
7 conditions of employment. In the case of a health  
8 care worker who is not an employee of the health  
9 care entity, such term includes any adverse action  
10 taken against the worker or the worker’s employer,  
11 including the cancellation of or refusal to renew a  
12 contract with the health care worker or the em-  
13 ployer.

14 (4) CARE, SERVICES, OR CONDITIONS.—The  
15 term “care, services, or conditions” includes, with  
16 respect to a health care entity, all aspects of the  
17 care or treatment of patients by the health care en-  
18 tity (whether on an inpatient or outpatient basis),  
19 any health care related services provided directly or  
20 indirectly to a patient of the entity, the provision or  
21 use of any supplies or equipment utilized in connec-  
22 tion with the provision of such health care services,  
23 the coverage or provision of benefits under a health  
24 insurance policy or by a health maintenance organi-  
25 zation, the processing of claims under a health in-



1       surance policy, and any conditions that exist in any  
2       facility of the entity which affect or may affect the  
3       quality or safety of the health care services provided  
4       to patients.

5           (5) PERSON.—The term “person” includes an  
6       institution, Federal, State, or local governmental en-  
7       tity, or any other public or private entity.

8           (6) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means  
9       the Secretary of Labor.

10 **SEC. 7. NOTICE.**

11       (a) IN GENERAL.—Each health care entity shall post  
12       and keep posted, in conspicuous places on the premises  
13       of the health care entity where notices to employees and  
14       applicants for employment are customarily posted, a no-  
15       tice, to be prepared or approved by the Secretary, setting  
16       forth excerpts from, or summaries of, the pertinent provi-  
17       sions of this Act and information pertaining to the filing  
18       of a charge under section 2.

19       (b) PENALTY.—Any employer that willfully violates  
20       this section may be assessed by the Secretary a civil pen-  
21       alty not to exceed \$100 for each separate offense.

22 **SEC. 8. NONPREEMPTION.**

23       Nothing in this Act preempts any other law, and  
24       nothing in this Act shall be construed or interpreted to  
25       impair or diminish in any way the authority of any State

1 to enact and enforce any law which provides equivalent  
2 or greater protections for health care workers or the dis-  
3 closure of unsafe practices or conditions in the health care  
4 industry.

5 **SEC. 9. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

6       This Act shall apply to acts of retaliation or discrimi-  
7 nation occurring on or after the first day of the first  
8 month that begins after the date of the enactment of this  
9 Act.

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