



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruth Hassell-Thompson

## Senate Acts to Protect Nurses From Violence

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON January 25, 2010

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### *Legislation Raises Assault Penalty to Class C or D*

(Albany, NY) – On Monday, January 25, 2010, the New York State Senate passed legislation sponsored by Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson which would strengthen the penalties for individuals who injure or attempt to injure nurses while in the line of duty. Senate Bill 4018 renders the penalty for assault on registered nurses (RN) and licensed practical nurses (LPN) a class C or D felony.

This legislation would add registered nurses and licensed practical nurses when defining assault on emergency medical professionals. Current law acknowledges the importance of the work of police officers, firefighters, and EMTs by punishing assaults against these professionals. This bill would also recognize the important service to the public provided by RNs and LPNs, who suffer the highest proportions of injuries than any healthcare workers, by providing them with the same protections other first responders now have. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nearly 500,000 nurses each year become victims of violent crimes in the workplace. Most commonly reported acts of violence reported include spitting, biting, hitting and shoving. Threats of violence are an even more common occurrence. Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson(D-Bronx/Westchester), Chair of the Senate Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee said, “Nurses and other emergency medical professionals are often among the first to treat persons in need of medical assistance. By making these acts of violence against nurses a felony, an important standard will be set that violence against these medical professionals is not accepted and will not be tolerated.”

The incidence of assault is exacerbated by the fact that many hospitals across New York are often understaffed, leading many nurses to work in isolation with patients who may be suffering from mental illness or substance abuse, making violent behavior more likely.

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