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Chair, Subcommittee on Workplace Safety
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Healthcare professionals whom I have met with as Chair of the Assembly Subcommittee on Workplace Safety have consistently listed instituting a state-wide Safe Patient Handling program in New York State as a top priority. Safe Patient Handling is a policy and practice that replaces manual lifting and moving tasks for healthcare professionals with machines and training to properly lift and move patients safely, without injury to the patient or the handler. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the human body is not designed to lift greater than thirty-five pounds; good body mechanics such as lifting with your legs and keeping your back straight is not enough to prevent injuries, which is why a statewide Safe Patient Handling program is necessary.

The healthcare industry is ranked among the most hazardous both in the nation and in New York State. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare workers with patient care duties recorded 90,790 injuries and illnesses in 2005, nationally; the only occupations with a greater number of recorded injuries and illnesses were laborers, freight, stock and material movers (92,240 recorded injuries and illnesses). Forty-eight percent of these injuries and illnesses to healthcare employees cite over extension as the event leading to the injury. In New York State in 2005, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare workers also recorded the most injuries and illnesses (8,130).

Safe Patient Handling programs in New York State have already proven effective in preventing injuries and saving money by decreasing lost work days. In 2002, for example, employees at the New York State Veterans Home at Batavia experienced forty-two resident-handling injuries,

accounting for 1,862 lost work days that year. In 2005, the Veterans Home, with help from the Civil Service Employee Association (CSEA) Ergonomics Sub-Committee, applied for and received a workforce grant from the New York State/CSEA Partnership for Education Training in order to implement an effective Zero Manual Lift/Safe Resident Handling Program. After three years of implementation, the facility experienced a ninety-three percent reduction in lost workdays due to resident handling injuries.

Assemblywoman Susan John, Chair of the Assembly Labor Committee and Senator Tom Duane, Chair of the Senate Health Committee, are currently sponsoring A.2047/S.3839, which would (1) create a safe patient handling task-force, (2) direct the New York State Department of Health to establish a safe patient handling policy, and (3) require each covered health care facility to write and execute a plan that coincides with that policy. The Subcommittee on Workplace Safety strongly supports this legislation and considers passing the bill a top priority for the 2011-2012 legislative session.