Introduction

Teachers are not held in the same esteemed light as those who preceded them a century or two before now. Evidence of this is provided by the fact that teachers have been the targets of violent acts for quite some time. Through all of the turmoil, an important question has emerged: *Who is responsible for keeping teachers safe?* This research will explore the history of workplace protection legislation as well as select incidents involving violence against teachers across the nation. Outcomes and litigation from said cases will aid in determining the answer to the question. Several state statutes will also be examined.

Background

In the 1890s, the federal government made its first efforts to influence safety and health concerns in the workplace. Legislation was passed, targeting railroads and coal mines across the country. On December 29, 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Act was passed. Under this legislation, employers were mandated to provide workplaces that were safe from “recognized life-threatening hazards and work-related diseases.” (1125) Employees were not to be placed in environments that could cause death, be likely to cause death, or result in serious physical harm. However, there was one stipulation. The law only applied to workers of businesses that had an influence on interstate commerce. The federal, state, and local governments were exempt from the law, even though they were major employers also.

Instances of Violence Against Teachers

This section will provide dozens of instances of violence against teachers spanning from 1905 to 2014. However, for the purpose of this proposal, they have been omitted.

Statistics
The Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted a National Crime Victimization Survey for the years 1992 through 1996. The focus was on the rates of violence that occurred among every 1,000 workers in specific fields. At the top of the list were law enforcement officers, corrections officers and taxi drivers. Of the education field entrants, middle school staff members were the most prone to violent attacks. This was higher than the rate reported for bus drivers!

Numbers from New York City Public Schools indicated a marked increase by the 2002-2003 school year. Teacher and other staff member attacks amounted to 3,151 incidents, up from 2,268 the prior year. There were 994 assaults, up from 691 the previous year (The New York Times, 2003).

Reasons for Violence Against Teachers

In 1969, the Dodd committee offered its take on the school violence situation by offering racial desegregation and overcrowded juvenile correction systems as its reasons (Time, 1969). Later, in 2001, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) provided a list which included working in a community-based setting, contact with the public, and high crime areas (NEA Health Information Network, 2001). By the 2006-2007 school year, Tim Walker, a writer for the NEA Today, discussed peer pressure, media, and drug and alcohol abuse as several possible factors.

Conclusion

When comparing the state statutes to primary federal statute, one must come to the conclusion that the onus is upon the state to provide ample protection for teachers. This raises the question, “If a state is already exempt from liability with the presence of the federal law, why
would it assume the responsibility?” Then, perhaps, the state is not really responsible for providing protection for its teachers.

References


Georgia House of Representatives. (1999). *HB302- Children adjudicated delinquent; info Provided to school principals.*


