

Nurses speak out in support for RaDonda Vaught in advance of sentencing hearing

WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter
11 May 2022

Attend the online meeting Sunday, May 15: “The defense of RaDonda Vaught and the fight facing health care workers”

RaDonda Vaught, a former Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) nurse, is set to be sentenced Friday by a judge at the Davidson County Criminal Court in Tennessee. Vaught faces up to eight years in prison after being unjustly convicted for a medical error she made in 2017.

In advance of the sentencing, nurses throughout the US and internationally are speaking out over the scapegoating of Vaught for inadequate safety procedures at VUMC and the health care system as a whole. Nurses know that medical errors can happen, particularly with nurses overworked and understaffed.

Nurses are planning on convening at the Tennessee court on Friday, where Judge Jennifer L. Smith will rule on Vaught’s sentence. A Facebook group, Nurses March for RaDonda Vaught, has more than 12,000 members.

They have produced signs with slogans such as, “I am RaDonda,” “Heros to Zeros,” “Happy nurses week! Thank you! Now go to jail” and other expressions of solidarity with RaDonda Vaught.

On Wednesday, the Socialist Equality Party published a statement, “Suspend the sentence of Tennessee nurse RaDonda Vaught! No jail time, fines or penalties!” Nurses and other workers have responded to the statement with a flood of messages of support for Vaught. We are posting a selection of these statements below.

Melissa from Tennessee: “As a healthcare professional for almost 28 years, with most of that at VUMC, I know firsthand the difficulties that exist in the medical system. I stand with RaDonda and will fight for her!”

Jessica, a respiratory therapist in the United States: “RaDonda, what is happening to you is an absolute disgrace! I am a respiratory therapist, and throughout my career we have been understaffed. I have watched nurses and the rest of the hospital workers be just as understaffed.

“I stand in solidarity with you, I have been on the fence about leaving this career full stop, as I have ruined my body

in trying to keep up with the hospital’s demands. My heart and soul were broken during this pandemic as I was spit on by people who do not believe in the pandemic, as they were dying from the virus, and my father who decided that FOX News would not lie to him but his daughter would.

“I love taking care of people and still owe a lot of money for my education, but this will not stop with you. We are *all* at risk of being thrown in prison for being overworked, berated by doctors, managers, patients and their family members for not being able to be everywhere all at once and be expected to go 12+ hours without breaks, food, drinks and bathroom stops, and then possibly making an error that could have been fixed by the administration.

“An administration that does not care about our patients, only the dollars in their pocketbooks. You deserve better, and *all* hospital workers should stand with you!”

Tonio in Florida: “Stop the victimization of nurses! End the subordination of health care to profit!”

Yaslyn in Kansas: “Suspend the sentence of RaDonda Vaught! No jail time, penalties or conditions!”

Dora: “Profit before patient care, ridiculous. When will people wake up to where the real problem exists? Anyone is vulnerable as long as the overworked nurse situation continues.”

Todd in Texas: “This is not only scapegoating, but a slippery slope to a nursing crisis worse than what we already have on our hands. Who will want to be a nurse if the possibility of prison hangs over their head?”

Andy from Poland: “Given the conditions under which Ms Vaught was compelled to work, it is perhaps hardly surprising that on one occasion she made a mistake. That this mistake led to the death of a patient is, of course, greatly to be regretted, and one would be callous in the extreme not to imagine the suffering it has caused, and continues to cause, her family.

“However, for the authorities to victimize Ms Vaught is grossly unreasonable since this incident is clearly a result of healthcare being relegated to a position secondary to profit. Let us hope that decency prevails and the charge of

criminally negligent homicide against Ms Vaught is finally found to be without justification.”

Barbara from New York: “I support a just culture. Health care systems possess the resources needed to create and continually improve a system to keep patients safe. One solitary nurse is no match for the bully Vanderbilt hospital.

“RaDonda was initially examined by the board of nursing and was not stripped of her license. Vanderbilt hospital chose to have this nurse criminally charged instead of making changes and improvements to their system. Redonda’s sentence should be overturned, she should not have been found guilty and does not deserve any sentence.”

Jamie from Texas: “Short staffing levels cause harm to patients and staff and are intentionally designed for greed. Americans worked hard to pay for insurance, and it is being diluted. Then we are offered lower standards of care than we saw in the past.

“Nurses are leaving the bedside in droves because the stress involved to work in these environments is dangerous.”

Adrienne from Arizona: “I am a registered nurse, and I stand with RaDonda!”

Jennifer from Virginia: “I am at a loss for words when it comes to the verdict in this case. RaDonda did what every nurse would do if we made a medication error. We would report it, and she did! We are humans taking care of humans. Please remember that!”

Rebecca: “It could be me! ... It could be me. ... For forty years I have taught new nurses to report errors because ‘this is how we make improvements to the systems and processes.’ If we don’t know about it, how can we change it?”

“This conviction and sentence will set a precedent for all nurses to *stop reporting errors for fear of prosecution!* Please, please, please suspend the sentence.”

Laura from Indiana: “This has been a farce of a trial, and it’s obvious she is being used as a scapegoat. There’s evidence showing she didn’t give a lethal dose of the wrong medicine. She was not given the right to a fair trial with a jury of her peers. Unless they are registered nurses with experience they have zero idea what a nurse does and what was asked of her and the toxic environment of healthcare, especially at Vanderbilt.

“As a fellow RN, I can say with certainty that a lot of the nursing staff nationwide is going to be lost. We don’t feel safe working for anyone anymore. We know just how dispensable we are now with the pandemic as well as all of the legal cases of late.

“I stand with RaDonda Vaught.

“I stand with nurses.

“I stand for justice and equity.”

Catolyn from Connecticut: “This is totally unacceptable. As a nurse, I find it to be a situation anyone can be in. The responsibility should not only fall on the nurse. The employer covered this up, and they too should be held accountable.”

Lisa from Georgia: “Amen to this article! Nobody can understand the level of stress unless you have been there. She is *not* a criminal!”

Laurel: “I worked 16 hour shifts without time to drink a glass of water. When one of my ICU patients was bleeding out, I gave him some of my blood, direct transfusion, while I was caring for him. I took care of 90 patients in an elder facility on day shifts. Do the math. I felt like I hardly had time to breathe.

“I walked four miles each way to my job at a hospital when there was 20 inches of snow and the roads were impassible. I called off sick one day in my career when a highly transmissible GI virus was spreading. I was the only employee caring for patients in a rural ER—doing billing, treatments, calling doctors, doing triage, stabilizing acute patients.

“To say that registered nurses are on overload, yet very dedicated, is an understatement. To send this health care professional to jail would set a horrible standard, especially at a time when it’s expected there will be 2 percent less nurses in the work force next year.

“I urge you to suspend the sentence of RaDonda Vaught.”

Stacey from Washington: “Nurses make mistakes all the time. Criminalizing this nurse is wrong! This sets a precedent for all nurses in our profession. Suspend her sentence now!”

Veronica from Maryland: “Perfection is what we strive for. Most times it is attainable as long as everything is in place on all levels. The failure belongs to not just one nurse. There was a breakdown long before treatment was given. Do not overlook that fact. No time should be served.”

Anissa from Indiana: “I am a nurse of 15 years. Patient safety requires Just Culture Reporting. The only outcome for this case should be no fine and no sentence, full reinstatement of her RN license.”

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Submit your statement of support using the form below.



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