

**Jaime Balsamo, RN at UPMC Altoona – Testimony for Legislative Hearing  
State Capitol, Irvis Office Building Room 523  
May 7, 2024, 9:45 am**

**Note: Wear scrubs.**

Hello, I want to thank the Committee Members for holding this hearing during Nurses Week. My name is Jaime Balsamo and I've been a registered nurse for 16 years, the entire time at UPMC Altoona.

I have a deep-rooted dedication to Altoona because it has always been my family's and my community's hospital. I was born there. My son was born there. And every member of my family has gotten care there over the years.

But I am saddened to say that, since UPMC took us over ten years ago, Altoona has become a shell of what it used to be. We've watched our hospital's priorities go from a focus on patients to a focus solely on numbers.

Frontline healthcare workers no longer feel heard. We're treated as if our opinions don't matter and we're not cared about at all. The only thing that matters to UPMC corporate is how much work they can squeeze out of us with fewer and fewer resources.

I'm an example of the burnout and mass exodus away from the bedside that is plaguing our healthcare workforce. For the past three years I worked in the intensive care unit, which is where my passion lies. But just four months ago, I transferred out of the ICU to the cardiac catheter lab in order to avoid leaving Altoona altogether.

I just couldn't survive a minute longer in the ICU due to the working conditions, and I could no longer ethically accept the risks that my patients were facing.

Because of the fragile health of intensive care patients, nurses should not have more than two patients each, according to Altoona's own staffing guidelines. But ICU nurses at Altoona regularly have three patients, which violates these staffing guidelines and does not ensure the quality of care patients deserve. Sometimes I would be assigned as charge nurse and also have to respond to emergencies in other departments, forcing me to leave my critically ill patients' sides.

On our medical-surgical floors, nurses shouldn't have more than five to six patients to safeguard quality care, according to the hospital's guidelines. But they often have eight.

This makes it almost impossible to deliver the quality of care we believe in and leads to a sense of defeat and moral injury. Moral injury is when nurses's core values are violated by our lived experience. Every day I worked in the ICU I would wake up and say to myself, "I cannot do this anymore."

It's gotten so bad that our patients have started to speak out as well. Recently there has been a flood of [letters to the editor](#) in our local newspaper by patients describing their horrendous experiences.

We have a strong union at Altoona, SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania, which provides us with more rights than non-union UPMC workers. But our union only represents a fraction of UPMC's [100,000 employees](#), making it hard to create the changes we desperately need. That's why we need our elected representatives to create and enforce standards throughout our Commonwealth's healthcare system to protect patients, communities and frontline workers.

Thank you.