

Michelle Boyle, RN at AGH – Testimony for Legislative Meeting
State Capitol, Irvis Office Building Room 523
May 7, 2024, 9:45 am

Note: Wear scrubs.

Hi, my name is Michelle Boyle and I've been a registered nurse for 30 years. I appreciate being able to speak today.

I work as a nurse on a medical surgical floor at Allegheny General Hospital. Nursing is one of the most rewarding jobs, where I contribute to the well being of my patients. In the most difficult and darkest hours for a person, nurses are present to help patients through their healing and provide dignity when patients feel their most vulnerable.

When I started in nursing I expected stressful situations. Over the past three decades, however, healthcare has gone from stressful to traumatizing as corporatized healthcare has taken over. Big corporations' relentless push toward consolidation of market power, decimating frontline staffing, suppressing wages and excluding frontline healthcare workers' voices from patient care decisions, has created traumatizing conditions for both patients and nurses.

Due to traumatizing conditions, nurses are leaving in droves. Up to 50% of new nurses leave their first job within 3 years and 60% within 8 years. We have licensed nurses, but they aren't willing to work in traumatizing conditions. There are over 81,000 licensed registered nurses in Pennsylvania who are not currently employed in healthcare.

At AGH, we fought to have a voice to address this crisis because we are a strong union, SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania.

In our latest union contract, we improved our staffing ratios, ratios that are unparalleled in our Commonwealth. Numeric ratios that also take into account the acuity of our patients to ensure safe care.

To help bring nurses in the door, we raised the starting wage by nearly 30% to \$40 an hour. And to retain nurses, we negotiated overall raises of as much as 29%. We defended our 100% covered premiums and decreased our co-pays for mental health visits to \$5 and defended our pension.

We want all nurses to enjoy the same standards. Unfortunately the vast majority of Pennsylvania's 140,000 nurses are not-yet-union and struggling in extreme traumatizing conditions without a voice on the job.

That's why we need legislative and protective standards, like the Patient Safety Act, to hold the corporate healthcare systems accountable. And we need elected officials to step up to ensure that more nurses and healthcare workers have the ability to organize and bargain for better standards in their hospitals and nursing homes for their patients and themselves.

The majority of money that flows into our healthcare systems comes directly from taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid, and there is no reason we should continue to allow the healthcare industry to lower standards and deny healthcare workers a voice.

The suits who created this crisis aren't fixing it. The frontline healthcare workers, well we know we didn't break it, but we sure as heck show up at every opportunity to fix it. We need your help. Patients need more people in scrubs and less suits.

Thank you.