

Good Morning! My name is Jeffrey Shook and I am Professor of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh and Principal Investigator of the Pittsburgh Wage Study. The Pittsburgh Wage Study began in 2016 as a mixed methods longitudinal study of hospital workers and other low wage workers in Pittsburgh. As the study evolved the study team observed that while wages were important to worker well-being, hospital workers also consistently discussed the impact of work conditions on their well-being. So, we expanded our focus to include issues such as staffing, unsafe work conditions and worker voice in decision-making.

Key findings from a recent report found that 93% of hospital workers were thinking about leaving the field at least once a month and 37% were thinking about leaving daily and unsafe staffing levels is a big contributor to individuals leaving the field. Seventy-three percent of former hospital workers we surveyed cited staffing as a key issue in their decision to leave. As one nurse reported, "I worked in multiple different hospitals across the city. Every single one was the same. Not enough staff and continued increase of expectations while grossly understaffed."

Unsafe staffing has also placed many additional pressures on workers and patients. Many reported feeling pressured to work overtime, not having meals or breaks, performing tasks outside their job, and the high physical and mental toll of high caseloads. As one nurse stated, "People don't know out there like how bad it really is, and they don't know when they come to the hospital how dangerous it could possibly be, because of staffing levels."

Low pay and unsafe staffing have contributed to high rates of mental health issues among Pittsburgh hospital workers including depression, anxiety, trauma and suicidal ideation. A nurse summed up their experience, "...every day that you walk in that hospital you feel like you're walking into chopper blades. Every day. There are no good days." Hospital workers also reported that they receive little support or help with mental health challenges from management and the hospital systems they work for.

Workers continually expressed that the challenges they face are exacerbated by their lack of voice in decision-making. One worker said, "I think the biggest problem with working for a conglomerate like UPMC is the automatic kind of thought that you are just a robot and you cannot be trusted...you don't get to make decisions for yourself or your clients, because...it's bill, bill, bill, we need to make money." Many of the nurses and other hospital workers we have talked with have real ideas for solutions to address the issues they face but with no voice in decision-making these ideas too often go unheard.

Through our study we have talked to so many committed and dedicated hospital workers. In Pittsburgh, where I live and work, they have really become the backbone of our city. I appreciate the committee listening to my testimony and working to find real solutions to better support our hospital workers. We have to do better.