



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NURSES ASSOCIATION
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Hearing

TESTIMONY, May 27, 2020

My name is Wala Blegay and I am the staff attorney for District of Columbia Nurses Association (DCNA) and we represent the nurses in the District of Columbia. We are a full-service professional organization and labor union solely dedicated to representing health care professionals in the District of Columbia. With over 2,100 members, DCNA advances the health care profession by fostering high standards of practice, promoting the economic and general welfare of employees in the workplace and lobbying District officials regarding health care issues. We are bringing our concerns regarding the pay freezes in the Mayor's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget and Financial Plan. DCNA has been informed that the Mayor intends on implementing the pay freeze from now until 2024.

This is concerning for DCNA because many of our members were on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic and deserve a raise and hazard pay. We represent nurses at Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) and Department of Youth and Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) who are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic

working in dangerous working conditions. Our members at St. Elizabeth's, CPEP and DYRS in March and April worked in dangerous working conditions where the District officials refused to provide them with proper protective equipment (PPE) when there were concerns of patients who had possible COVID-19 symptoms or interacted with individuals who were COVID-19 positive. Many District officials ignored the concerns of our members. At St. Elizabeth's, over 30 nurses tested positive for COVID-19 and they witnessed the death of multiple patients. At CPEP and DYRS, at least 4 nurses tested positive for COVID-19 and one nurse has COVID-19 in the brain.

In April, DCNA sent out a demand for more testing for health care workers because of the vast concern by our members that they were being encouraged to work with staff who were COVID-19 positive without protection. Many of our members worked in units where there was a delay in informing nurses that they had direct contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. Many District officials informed nurses that despite their direct contact with someone who was COVID-19 positive, they were not allowed to quarantine until they were showing symptoms. This directive was given despite the clear evidence that COVID-19 is contagious regardless of whether the person was asymptomatic. Additionally, nurses were encouraged to reuse PPE despite the danger of contamination.

These unsafe practices caused many nurses, including those who had underlying health conditions, to test positive for COVID-19. Many nurses, who have children and families, infected their families or were forced to quarantine away from their families. One nurse who was infected with COVID-19 reported that due to her COVID-

19 infection, her entire family is COVID-19 positive including her husband and son. We even had a nurse who was in ICU due to COVID-19.

In light of the unsafe working conditions that our nurses experienced, our nurses deserve a raise and hazard pay. On April 13th, DCNA sent a hazard pay proposal to Director Lindsey Maxwell of the Office of Labor Relations and Collective Bargaining. Our heroic nurses have made the sacrifice during this crisis and should be rewarded with pay raises and hazard pay. DCNA is preparing for negotiations and we intend to include raises in our negotiating proposals from FY2021 to 2024. DCNA is requesting pay raises and hazard pay for our members. Thank you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wala Blegay', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Wala Blegay, Esq.