

2/24/23 CCH Board Meeting
Written Testimony from Genevieve Lewis-Piotrowski

My name is Genevieve Lewis _____ and I am a registered nurse working within the Neonatal ICU at CCH. I am here to object to the excessive use of outside staffing agencies that have wasted millions of taxpayer dollars, violated the terms of the collective bargaining agreement with union staff nurses, and have even put our patients lives at risk . We need nursing and support staff at Cook County Health, but we are becoming too dependent on multimillion dollar agency contracts when we could instead use local, union nurses for a fraction of the cost. These agency nurses were supposed to be a temporary fix while we endeavor to hire permanent staff from our community that care about the longterm mission of our public healthcare system. County Health is approving multiyear contracts worth as much as \$45 million! This money should be used to recruit permanent staff which would work for a fraction of the cost and who have deep roots in our community. Some of these savings from could then be used to make Cook County Health more attractive in the labor market and helps us keep our existing staff and reward them for their loyalty to our community and patients.

I am also concerned that there is ineffective oversight of the contents of these agency contracts by Cook County authorities. In my experience many of the agency nurses who claim to have the competencies and training necessary to care for babies in the ICU are in fact woefully unprepared. We often to struggle to find assignments for them to complete safely and once we do train them they leave us for our next travel assignment. I can't tell you how demoralizing it is when you are training a nurse making over twice as much as you, only to have them leave after a couple of weeks. This underscores the need to fill not just bedside positions, but our nurse clinician and educator positions which have been cut from past budgets within the Peds and NICU departments.

Furthermore, these agency contracts seem to violate our current collective bargaining agreements. For example, many of these agency nurses are PROMISED weekly overtime. It's literally built into their schedule which violates the rights of senior nurses in our department while also wasting millions of taxpayer dollars. I thought we were supposed to be cutting back on overtime? Instead we are giving overtime to agency nurses who are already well compensated for their services.

To conclude, I am asking the board and the CEO to provide additional oversight to audit every single agency contract and hold off on any additional funds until we are sure they comply with our current contracts. Also, I want to make sure that for every agency nurse that works at CCH for more than 30 days a union nurse position is posted as required by our contract. Thank you for your attention and I hope you can help us and our patients.