

Chairman Taylor and distinguished members of the Cook County Health Board of Directors,

My name is Rick Ortega. I'm an MRI Tech and have worked in Cook County Health for the past 27 years. I want to draw your attention to issues of recruitment and retention within the Radiology department and the resulting impact on staffing levels and patient care. In MRI, we have a backlog of at least 6-9 months from when a patient schedules an appointment to when they can be seen – for some patients, this wait could mean life or death. Daily wait times can reach as long as 4 hours for patients; even after some patients wait as long as a year for an appointment, it may be rescheduled due to short-staffing.

In the last year, the Radiology department at Stroger has lost at least 6 techs due to burnout from severe short-staffing and lack of growth opportunities within the department. Our union is meeting with CCH and Radiology management at the end of this month with the intent to negotiate a cross-training program that is desperately needed within the department. If we want to get serious about retaining skilled technicians within the department, we need to act with urgency around a cross-training program that invests in committed, full-time CCH employees and solves short-staffing issues in the department.

Flooding the department with temporary agency staff is a short-term and incredibly expensive solution. Currently in MRI, there are 5 agency techs that are each being paid \$60 per hour. At the same time, there are full-time X-Ray technicians already certified in MRI and are waiting to be cross-trained to qualify for the position. It seems like the number of budgeted positions for agency staff is significantly higher than budgeted positions for full-time workers. Who is making those budgetary decisions, and why aren't full-time budgeted positions prioritized? The workers in Radiology are stretched incredibly thin, our patients deserve better, and I'm asking this board to work with us to make sure we remain an employer and provider of choice in our community.

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My name is Norman Thomas, and I'm a Building Service Worker at Stroger Hospital. I've worked for the County for the past 12 years, and take immense pride in keeping this hospital as clean as possible for our patients, community, and staff. Over the past year, our department has seen a huge influx of temporary agency staff from EBM Inc. in the department, and it's starting to seem more permanent than temporary. Environmental Services is crucial in preventing and controlling disease and viruses across the hospital that harm patients and the public; if massive agency contracts are needed to fill scheduling gaps, it should be a wake-up call to prioritize recruitment for vacant, full-time positions. Let's not overcomplicate it: CCH needs to post vacancies in accordance with our Collective Bargaining Agreement, give long-term agency workers in the department an opportunity to apply for full-time positions, have a hiring event for EVS, and get serious about our staffing problems. I'm asking this board to take an honest look at how much CCH is spending on agency contracts every year, and start asking the hard questions to see if we're putting our money where our mouth is in the community.