

Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Hearing

Tuesday, February 1st, 2022

Hearing on Pennsylvania School Staffing Shortages

Testimony from: Chris Naylor, Legislative Director, UFCW 1776

Senator Muth, Senator Williams and members of the PA Senate Democratic Policy Committee:

My name is Chris Naylor, legislative director for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 1776. Our union represents more than 30,000 Pennsylvania workers in multiple industries including retail grocery, pharmacies, food processing facilities, meatpacking plants, medical cannabis locations and many other workforces. We also represent workers in food service in various sectors, including two bargaining units in K-12 school districts located in the Pocono School District, as well as the Beaver Area School District.

As we know from the various sectors we represent workers, staffing issues have created extreme hardships for workers who are already dealing with the health and job risks associated with COVID-19. Food service workers in our K-12 schools are no different.

We would like to keep our testimony brief to allow for discussion on best ways to address these staffing issues that exist. In speaking with our team, they have given multiple issues to raise with the committee here today as we continue to think about how to improve staffing in this critical sector.

1. Due to staffing shortages, Local 1776 members have, at times, been responsible for new and multiple tasks. They have had to expand their responsibilities to help fulfill needs in the community while ensuring food is prepared and served when school facilities are operational.
2. Due to the uncertainty surrounding whether a school may be open or not (with the ability for hybrid learning or strict virtual), this has presented challenges with workers having to look for other sources of income that conflicts with their work schedules at the Pocono Mountain School District. This has hampered recruitment and retainment of workers in food service who may move on to a more structured work schedule.
3. By being understaffed, the customer service to the students is impacted as workers are forced to fill-in for vacancies and take on other responsibilities to keep kitchens operational at times.
4. We have negotiated on behalf of workers in this sector to increase the base/entry level rates and to provide a one-time adjustment increase to incumbent employees to help with job retention. This has helped, to a degree, to stabilize and retain workers this school year.

5. Our members do have paid sick days we collectively bargained, however, uniformity and access to paid sick days for all is needed. In addition, uniform health and safety standards across the Commonwealth would help to foster (1) clearer direction and communications at schools and (2) better protocols to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff, teachers and students alike.

With these key points in mind, we do urge the legislature to consider creative solutions to help with staffing in this sector. As the Pennsylvania Senate Democrats have noted multiple times, we are sitting on billions of dollars in federal aid from the American Rescue Plan that can be used to help with the effects of COVID-19. One of those effects has been the understaffing of key essential sectors, as workers continually report to essential jobs yet feel like they are not rewarded or compensated properly for their work.

Issues we collectively bargain over, such as wages, retention bonuses and paid leave policies, could all be examined by the legislature to see which workers in essential industries would best benefit from more economic incentives. Recruitment and retainment of workers go hand in hand in any good workplace.

Our members stand ready to work with this Committee and any lawmaker who wants to join together to help address the issues that exist for food service workers in our Commonwealth's schools. On behalf of our members, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify here today. We look forward to continuing to take part in any discussion around improving the valued work our members do for educators, students and the communities where they work.