

Testimony on FY 21 Special Appropriation

**By Nancy Austin, School Community Health Nurse and Shop Steward, UFCW Local 1994
MCGEO**

Position Favorable

My name is Nancy Austin and I am a School Community Health Nurse in Montgomery County Schools, or I was at the schools until Covid 19 turned everything on its head. School Community Health nurses and School Health room Technicians are employees of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

Before Covid-19, we had an incredibly difficult time recruiting and retaining school nurses. Private sector nurses make a lot more money. But it isn't just the money, it's also the workload. Historically, we have too few nurses and we're asked to more with less. Inevitable burn out ensues and our nurses leave us for the private sector.

We had a recruitment and retention problem before Covid. Unfortunately, Covid has exacerbated the problem.

The Pandemic has forced us into a complete transformation. What was our jobs - caring for school children – went away a year ago. Instead, we were re-deployed to shelters, jails, Covid testing and vaccine distribution, Call Center, and Contact tracing. We work day, evening, and overnight rotations, instead of Monday through Friday in our schools.

When this all happened, we didn't complain, didn't argue. We stepped forward and did it because that is what public sector healthcare workers do.

We have been front-facing seven days a week for a year. Now we are going back to our schools.....and they look nothing like they did before Covid. We will still care for children who are medically fragile, also diabetics and asthmatics, but we will also have this lurking shadow of Covid. As nurses, though, we can't be hidden. We will need to be available to our children. You can't administer care behind a plexiglass screen.

We don't just need our general wage adjustment and our other collectively bargained increases, we deserve them. We can't help if there's a pandemic, but we've kept this county running despite all the problems the pandemic caused. We don't need your thanks; we need your action. We need to be compensated fairly.

I urge you to pass this increase. Thank you.