



In Support of SB 1002: AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING MATTERS and In Support of HB 6595: AN ACT CONCERNING LABOR MATTERS RELATED TO COVID-19, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND OTHER STAFFING ISSUES

Good Morning Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and members of the Committee. My name is Eric Canada, and I have been in state service 26 years, at DMHAS since 2017. I work in Woodward Hall at CVH. I'm here to testify in support of hero pay in Senate Bill 1002 and House Bill 6595.

Before the pandemic it was really stressful to work here. Staffing was low, so I was constantly getting mandated. Staffing and lack of support were our primary concerns because no one was giving us any direction on what to do when issues came up with patient care. If we were fatigued from being mandated, we constantly got in trouble. The Administration would discipline us for leaving a mandate if we were too exhausted, and they would also discipline us if we stayed and nodded off. When we tried to work our scheduled third shift, we would then get forced onto first shift 4 days in a row. The body can't do that every week without suffering fatigue. When we walk into our unit, and we don't have enough staff, and have patients with constant observation and other patients who need total care, it was very stressful. When the pandemic hit, it added stress onto us.

Everything was new, no one knew how COVID affected you, or affected your body. We were still being mandated onto units that were quarantined, and we couldn't refuse. COVID hit me personally because I was forced onto Battell 4N when 7 patients on that unit tested positive – that unit at that time was being turned into a makeshift COVID unit because so many patients tested positive. I can remember walking on that unit, being forced to go over there and the patient just threw up on the floor. This was before everyone had a n95 - they had started fitting people but there was lack of PPE kits. I walked on that unit with a surgical mask.

Patients were sick, and I did end up getting an N95 but it was later in the shift. We did the best we could. We fed them, we changed the patients. Caring for the patients is the first objective and we did everything we could. The next day, I had symptoms. I don't know who I got it from. I gave it to my wife. And during that time my son was going through chemo which meant he was compromised at that time. He had just started with the chemo. It was very difficult because he had to live in a separate part of our home while going through this. It was fortunate that he was old enough and I had my younger son here at the time to help out, but he missed a few chemo treatments because my wife and I were sick. By the grace of God we got through that. I had a high fever for 6 days – fatigue and chills. My wife had no smell and a headache. And this was stress on top of added stress because CVH had no direction. They denied me my COVID leave initially because two months prior at work I had an exposure on my unit - a patient coughed in my face who tested positive, and I went out for one day to get tested. Someone labeled it incorrectly as COVID time so when I was actually sick they said I had already used my COVID leave. So when I actually got sick with COVID, I had to fight for my COVID time. While sick with COVID.

The lack of direction was terrible. No one knew anything. Management wasn't helping the infection control nurse, so she couldn't give us direction. I'm still feeling the effects of COVID, I have fatigue. My body doesn't react the way it did before, I still get body aches and chills, especially when my body gets run down working mandates in a row, the fatigue is just much stronger.

So many of my coworkers got sick at this time. The other unit across the hall had a whole shift that got sick at the same time. Every patient on that unit tested positive. I knew staff were positive because they were walking around looking flushed. The third shift nurse definitely came down with it but she was a trooper. She took temps, was caring for the patients, getting them ready to transfer to the COVID unit – the job doesn't stop even when you feel like crap on the floor.

I'm here asking that you have a little compassion for the staff who take care of these patients. We are human, and I know at times state employees get a bad rap. But we're human. We do the hard work, we put ourselves in danger and regardless, we brought it home to our families. I brought it home to my wife who got sick. I fought it, I got better. And I went back and have been in the trenches every day since. This is about having compassion for the people who made the sacrifices to take care of these patients. We deserve compensation for the risks that we took and still take every day. Please pass Senate Bill 1002 and House Bill 6595.