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Before the Labor Committee

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 Darion Young. I have worked in state service for seven and a half years, and currently I work in Whiting as a Forensic Treatment Specialist. I'm here today to testify in support of hero pay in Senate Bill 1002 and House Bill 6595.

Before the pandemic, DMHAS had plenty of time to get organized and figure out exactly what they needed to do. But when the pandemic hit, management's first reaction was to come on the units and take all our PPE – they took all our gloves, sanitation wipes, and masks. They took them off the unit completely. We thought they were going to replace the supplies but they didn't. They were winging it. They had employees coming to work who were wearing masks on their own & Directors of Nurses telling people they were not allowed to wear masks. The first patient we had on Unit 2 who was symptomatic was an older man who was having trouble breathing, and coughing. We had no PPE to protect ourselves and our patients. Nurses were swabbing patients without wearing masks or gloves because management took all of our gloves away. At some point the administration started allowing people to wear masks but we had to sign a waiver to wear one. A few days later, everyone had to wear a mask. The rules changed so many times I can't even count.

COVID came into the building because patients were admitted with COVID. No one was wearing masks at this point and we didn't have PPE on the units. Everyone on Unit 2 got exposed, and pretty much everyone on that unit got sick. Other people who floated from other units to cover our unit would then go back to their original unit and bring COVID with them so it kept spreading. Staffing levels were so low prior to the pandemic that floating staff were needed everywhere. It spread like wildfire, and it took its turn through every unit. The whole thing was a mess.

I got covid and it almost killed me. My wife works from home and the kids were distanced learning. My family was safe from exposure except for me, because I was essential. I caught covid from work and I brought it home. I got my wife sick and my oldest daughter. I really got sick on mother's day, and was symptomatic for 8-9 days. Once I started feeling better I started having complications because I started coughing up blood which resulted in multiple pulmonary embolisms, and that could have really taken me out. They were very serious clots, and I'm stuck taking blood thinners still from COVID. I still have bouts of fatigue where I don't even feel like getting out of bed. I have to come into work still, and we're still short staffed so each day I go

into work I'm getting mandated so I work 16 hours straight every day. The amount of stress is incredible. I'm a year removed from my covid infection, but I still have these lingering effects and I hope they go away but they still don't understand exactly what this does.

Workers like me have to continuously keep working, continuously keep suiting up and going into this fire every day. We deserve hero pay. There's signs in people's yards that we're heroes, they say it in commercials and on tv and yet no one wants to compensate us for these risks. We survived but there's no telling what the long term effects are on someone's health, and I know for a fact that if I had ability to work from home I would never have gotten this. I got it at work, and I put my family's life in danger. It's real, and it's a slap in the face.

There are two Connecticut's. The rich make their money because we – the essential workers, the middle class – come into work every day. we're the ones at risk, we're the ones taking care of our patients day in and day out. When I signed up to work in hazardous duty I knew I had to be at work rain hail sleet or snow. No one anticipated this life-threatening virus. Please pass Senate Bill 1002 and House Bill 6595.