

SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin: Nurses and caregivers applaud creation of Dane County Health Care and Public Health Workforce Needs Subcommittee

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Madison, WI- Local nurses and caregivers are applauding a vote by the Health and Human Needs Committee of the Dane County Board of Supervisors on May 26 to create a “Health Care and Public Health Workforce Needs Subcommittee”. The subcommittee will bring together stakeholders to assess the needs and problems facing the healthcare workforce and recommend solutions that will promote recruitment, retention, training, and the mental health and well-being of frontline workers. Subcommittee members will include nurses and healthcare workers, union leaders, advocates, employers and Dane County officials. The effort is likely the first of its kind, and could serve as a trailblazing model throughout the state and nation.

Subcommittee appointees include: Supervisor Mike Bare, Personnel and Finance Committee of the Dane County Board of Supervisors; Supervisor Kierstin Huelsemann, Health and Human Needs Committee of the Dane County Board of Supervisors; Supervisor Holly Hatcher, Board of Health for Madison and Dane County; Pat Raes, Registered Nurse at Meriter Hospital and President, SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin; Tami Burns, Registered Nurse, UW Health; Tatiana Smith, Certified Nursing Assistant, Oakwood Village; Patti Becker, Director of Program Operations, Community Living Alliance; Dr. Gene Musser, MD, Member of the Dane County Board of Health and Wisconsin Medical Society; Kerri Kliminski, Chair, Nursing Department, Madison College; Dr. Nainika Nanda, MD, Dane County Medical Society; Dr. John Beasley, MD, Dane County Medical Society; Tim Conroy, Executive

Director, Capitol Lakes Retirement Community; and Dr. Mark Huth, MD, President and CEO of Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin.

According to the motion, the subcommittee members will be appointed by June 1, will meet by June 20, will hold a public hearing by July 20 and will report their recommendations to the Health and Human Needs Committee of the Dane County Board at its August 11 meeting. The County's press release can be read [here](#).

"On behalf of all nurses and healthcare workers, I want to express my deepest thanks and gratitude to the Health and Human Needs Committee, Chair Heidi Wegleitner and Supervisor Michael Bare for establishing this crucial subcommittee," said Pat Raes, a subcommittee member who has been a registered nurse at Meriter for over 32 years and is president of the state's largest healthcare union, SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin. "As frontline healthcare workers, we too often feel like we are not being heard. So the fact that Dane County Supervisors have recognized and acknowledged our urgent concerns and included us in this process really means a lot to us. The pandemic has compounded long term, systemic problems in our healthcare system, including severe understaffing and turnover. Healthcare workers are utterly drained and depleted, suffering from trauma, and many are leaving the healthcare industry altogether. The Health Care and Public Health Workforce Needs Subcommittee will be able to assess our most pressing problems, review best practices, and make recommendations for innovative, creative solutions. I'm filled with hope and confidence that together we can stabilize the healthcare workforce and ensure safe, quality care for communities throughout Dane County."

Wisconsin has been facing a spiraling healthcare workforce shortage and could have [10,000 empty nursing positions](#) by the end of this decade. In January of this year, SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin conducted a professional poll of 920 Dane County healthcare workers which quantitatively reinforced their lived experiences and had alarming findings, including: 90% of healthcare workers believe understaffing is having a major negative impact on their patients; 86% have experienced stress or trauma during the pandemic; 85% feel like they're working in a war zone; 82% have considered leaving the field and/or know a co-worker who has; 69% say there has been a negative impact on family and personal relationships; 19% know a healthcare worker who has considered suicide; and 97% support the creation of a program to address the crisis.

"This subcommittee is absolutely critical because we need to create fundamental change in our healthcare system to address the urgent crisis facing the medical

workforce and our patients,” said Amanda Klinge, a registered nurse at UW Health in the orthopedic trauma unit with six years of service. “I pride myself on being a very resilient person who is a rock for my patients, their families, my coworkers and my own family. But the situation in my hospital has become so dire that it has caused me incredible moral injury and distress. For the past several years we’ve faced severe staff reductions and cuts leading to difficulties with retention and recruitment. Combined with the effects of the pandemic, we’ve been stretched thin to the point of not being able to do our jobs at the level we’ve been trained for. Recently I started to become so worried sick for my patients and utterly exhausted that it was a struggle just to get out of bed. For the first time in my career, my doctor ordered me to take a two and a half week leave from work. It gives me great sadness to say that my exhaustion prevented me from being the mother I strive to be for my five year old daughter and two year old boy. And that in turn put an added burden and stress on my husband and our marriage. On top of all this, I had to take an incomplete this semester for my bachelor of nursing program. My work used to be a place where I could go and have a profound sense of purpose. Now my work is a source of intense anxiety. I’m deeply grateful to Dane County Supervisors for creating this subcommittee, because it’s a major step toward promoting accessible mental health counseling, retention and continuing education, all of which would greatly benefit me and my coworkers at this very moment.”