



SEIUHealthcare
United for Quality Care

February 11, 2020
Bianca Stedman, LPN
MacDougall-Walker CI, DOC
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and other esteemed members of the Committee. My name is Bianca Stedman. I am a Nurse at the maximum security correctional institution, Garner. I am speaking before you today to address the critical need for additional funding and additional staffing in our medical and mental health units.

My colleagues and I provide medical care in various forms. For example intake, routine monitoring, acute care, organizing outpatient care, and discharge functions. As part of the Health Services Unit, we are required to triage medical issues in real-time, as they occur. Our medical care and responsibilities do not happen in a vacuum. They happen consecutively as well as concurrently.

With the current staffing levels, there is an ostensible feeling of “helplessness”. Make no mistake; there is an absolute commitment to perform our jobs to the very best of our ability with the resources given to us. When I say “helplessness” it is because with the current funding/staffing situation, our ability to be more responsive in providing treatment is becoming increasingly difficult. It is my firm belief that if we could address medical issues as they present, we will be able to hopefully prevent more acute crises be it the result of behavioral or even mental health origins. We will be able to consistently perform the type of care that encourages inmates to become proactive in their medical care. For example, monitoring their food intake to prevent elevated blood sugar levels, high blood pressure, or other preventable chronic issues. Our work is not meant to be one-sided. Inmates that receive a beneficial level of care will be able to return to their families and communities in a healthier state. Certainly, there are also tangential benefits to increased staffing/funding: improved collaboration between treatment systems, improved workplace safety, and reduced inmate medical crises.

All too often, financial and cultural barriers prevent people from seeking adequate medical care while out in the community. When they are admitted to correctional facilities, we try to identify previously undiagnosed or untreated medical issues. Increased staffing would allow us to perform more comprehensive assessments. We will be able to address these issues on the “ground floor”. One of our primary goals is to help inmates see that many medical issues can be regulated through their own behavioral efforts. Once this is realized, they are more willing to actively engage. This will hopefully improve their lots not just while incarcerated but once returned to the community.

I would like to conclude my testimony with a direct appeal. Our work can positively influence inmates to manage their lives. Our work saves lives. Far too often, we do minimum care because it’s all that time, resources, and staffing allow. No one wants acute medical incidents to happen. You are in the position to help us literally and figuratively save lives.

Please continue to protect and increase funding for inmate healthcare. Thank you.