

Testimony for City Council

July 17, 2018

Good Afternoon. My name is Sara Goodkind and I'm a faculty member in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. My research examines policies, programs and services designed to support children and families. While these support systems have had some success, my work has led me to the conclusion that we also need to focus on creating jobs with livable wages if we are to truly support families. Unfortunately, too many working families have fallen behind due to stagnating wages and the fact that so many jobs do not pay enough to enable families to meet their needs.

I am here testifying today because UPMC is one of the largest employers in our region. Its expansion will have substantial effects in many areas, and I strongly believe we need to consider the effects it will have on its workers. A research study I am involved in, with colleagues at Pitt, can shed some light on the experiences of hospital service workers living on low wages and how their lives improve as their wages increase.

Some of the key findings from this study reveal that:

- Despite working full-time, with many working overtime, workers have a hard time making ends meet, with most living paycheck to paycheck and facing financial hardships, food insecurity, and medical hardships.
- Workers employ a variety of strategies to make ends meet, including juggling bills, borrowing money, living with family and friends, and relying on public and private assistance.
- Following a pay raise that all workers in our study received, hardships and reliance on these strategies remained but decreased.
- Workers making more than \$15 an hour face fewer hardships than workers making less than \$15 an hour, though both groups still face hardships.

Our research demonstrates that many hospital workers struggle to meet their needs and pay their bills. As housing costs increase, they struggle to remain city residents. These findings are consistent with other research that has documented that the wages earned by a large percentage of the U.S. workforce are not sufficient to meet basic needs. Positively, our research shows that when workers receive a pay increase, their lives improve.

As our region continues to grow and prosper, it is essential that we consider who benefits from this growth, and especially how it impacts workers and their families. As our anchor institutions continue to grow, we need to address how this growth affects the city and region, especially the workers who make these institutions run. UPMC prides itself on being a national leader in healthcare and has the opportunity to also be a leader in improving life for service workers. By including the voice of workers in planning regional growth, we can work to meet their needs and reduce the hardships they face, thus insuring that this growth is equitable and realized by all.