

My name is Barb O'Brien. I am a registered nurse with CountyCare, an affiliate of Cook County Health and Hospital Systems. I grew up on the southwest side of Chicago to parents who struggled to provide for their family. My father left school in the 6th grade to start work and my mother's shorthand skills and impressive 92 words per minute typing speed made her the perfect candidate for secretarial work. As a young person, I often remember heading to "The County Hospital" as my parents were not able to afford healthcare for us kids. At a very young age, Cook County Hospital became a part of my life.

Just three years ago, I accepted the offer to work as a nurse for Cook County Health. I wish that I could adequately explain the sense of pride that I felt leaving private healthcare knowing that I was becoming a part of the legacy of the public health system. I remember being so full of hope and expectation and so thankful for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. I was so excited to call Cook County Health my employer - my home.

Sadly, the changes of the past three years have left me "expecting the worst, and hoping for the best". COVID-19 has forever changed the landscape of healthcare and nursing. Critical understaffing is at an all-time high, and lucrative agency contracts are being renewed at alarming rates. NNOC nurses have worked tirelessly providing stellar care to our patients and are now experiencing multiple reinfections with COVID DURING THE COURSE OF THEIR WORK. When OSHA mandated medical removal benefits, the county began to provide paid time for nurses who contracted COVID. Now, they are refusing to continue. Omicron is the most deadly, contagious strain to-date. County expects nurses to use their hard-earned personal sick time to cover this work-related illness. *Expect the worst, and hope for the best.*

The mass exodus of nurses has hit home - Cook County Hospital and Health Systems IS hemorrhaging. Staff nurses are leaving for agency positions which is further crippling the system. We NEED to stop the bleeding. We cannot continue to idly standby and watch experienced nurses leave - we need them to know that they are valued and appreciated. NNOC nurses will not abandon hope and are still here as stronger patient advocates than ever. Respectfully, you (board members) have the power to change the narrative and improve the outcomes. Nurses are not asking for Israel Rocha's salary - they are asking for hazard pay, incentives to pick up extra shifts to help with the staffing shortage, and the security of knowing that when (not if) they get COVID (again), their employer will not take advantage of the absence of a mandate to know how to respect nurses. We are hemorrhaging and we need your help. I am urging you to hear the hearts of your nurses and help us to continue to provide safe, compassionate care during this very difficult time. Let's not continue *to expect the worst, and hope for the best.* Thank you.