

Good evening. My name is Carol O'Neil and I am a Dietician at the General Medicine Clinic at Stroger Hospital of Cook County. My job is to provide hands on nutrition education and counseling for patients and their families. This includes diabetes education, weight management, cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, healthy eating, cooking, shopping and assessments of patients on home enteral feedings. I have served our community for 31 years in this capacity. Like many of the other speakers here, I can talk for hours about the challenges we face as CCHHS employees and the necessity of the services County employees provide.

I came this evening to speak with you about a disturbing trend I'm hearing from the budget hearings. I've heard many of the commissioners and other elected officials bemoaning the costs of employee salaries – how our wage increases are too costly, step increases should be frozen and employee health insurance is too generous. I've also heard commissioners attempt to insert themselves into the collective bargaining process by imposing wage freezes and increased healthcare costs.

Collective bargaining is the basis of the middle class in this country. One of the tenets of collective bargaining is that each contract has an executive negotiating the contract – not a legislative body or a board of directors. An executive has the power to negotiate on behalf of the employer. Unions negotiate with the executive on behalf of the members.

**Respectfully, Stay Out of Labor Contract Negotiations.** It's not your role as commissioners to insert yourselves in this process.

Commissioner Pappas recently took this theme to a new level when she bemoaned how unions and the salary increases we've negotiated over the years has impacted the Treasurer's Office budget. The Treasurer said that an employee making \$22,000 per year in 1998 now makes \$48,000. The Treasurer said this is a 116% increase, as if that is too much of an increase over 20 years. In the same time frame, the price of gas increased by 252%, bacon by 275%, ground beef by 230%, bread by 198%, and eggs by 227%. Treasurer Pappas used one statistic, out of context, in an attempt to discredit Cook County employee wages. As you just heard, a 116% increase in salary did not keep up with the cost of living.

Context is import. Everything in the collective bargaining process happens in a context of give and take negotiations. Both parties give to reach a deal.

Finally, Cook County employees are also community members and your constituents. We live here, we pay taxes here, we shop here, and we vote here. Vital Cook County Services protect everyone. Stop attacking us. Find alternative revenue sources to fill this budget gap. Cutting services and cutting employees will only cost taxpayers more in the end.

Carol O'Neil 11/2/17