

Stavn, Stephanie

From: Derek Wallace <derek.wallace4@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 25, 2024 12:28 AM
To: Stavn, Stephanie
Subject: Fwd: PP&J June 25, 2024 - PSC Staffing/Scheduling Issues + Hannah Thomas Statement
Attachments: 2024 Staffing Overview - NEW SCHEDULES.xlsx; Staffing Overview Comparison.xlsx; Hannah Thomas.docx

This Message Is From an External Sender

This message came from outside your organization.

Forwarding so it can be included with meeting minutes - thank you!

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Derek Wallace <derek.wallace4@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Jun 25, 2024 at 12:23 AM
Subject: PP&J June 25, 2024 - PSC Staffing/Scheduling Issues + Hannah Thomas Statement
To: Andrae, Richelle <Andrae.Richelle@countyofdane.com>, Kigeya, April <Kigeya.April@countyofdane.com>, <Collins.Aaron@countyofdane.com>, <Gray.Anthony@countyofdane.com>, <Peterson.David@danecounty.gov>, <Weigand.Jeff@countyofdane.com>, <Rose.Rick@countyofdane.com>
Cc: <Kuhn.Jamie@danecounty.gov>, Patrick Miles <miles@countyofdane.com>

Good evening Chair Andrae, Vice Chair Kigeya and Members of the Public Protection and Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for considering the collective voice of our 9-1-1 Communicators/Dispatchers employed by Dane County's Public Safety Communications (PSC) at your June 24 meeting.

We wrote to the County Board and County Executive a little over a week ago with a proposed alternative to implementing a mid-year shift pick by incentivizing Communicators to work extra hours. Since then, the mid-year shift selection occurred on Thursday, June 20. The new shift rotations are set to go into effect Sunday, June 30, meaning that not only is this unprecedented disruption to the workforce still set to be implemented, the workers themselves now has a mere ten (10) days to scramble and attempt to make arrangements to rearrange the entirety of their personal schedules and obligations mid-year (as a reminder, typically shift pick occurs in September after school schedules have been determined for that school year and workers have many months to prepare prior to the new shifts taking effect the start of the following calendar year).

EGR 720 started this week meeting with PSC management and with the Department of Administration (DOA) for the first time since our last email a week ago. The department ran the numbers of the schedule set to be implemented on June 30, and determined that if the new shifts are implemented, the staffing minimums would improve as the department would increase its authority and capacity to involuntarily mandate Communicators to work more hours (see attached spreadsheets). However, even under the new schedule, the department's own analysis shows that there will still be well over 100 instances this summer where the minimum staffing levels are projected to be understaffed by three, four or five Communicators. These numbers don't also reflect the increase in FMLA requests, unplanned absences, transfers, reassignments and expedited retirements and resignations that will undoubtedly occur due to such a disruptive event to the lives of the 60+ Communicators employed by the department.

In our meeting with PSC and DOA, we took the opportunity to explain that based on the feedback from our members, an incentive-based approach was expected to not just improve minimum staffing this summer, but that our projections indicate we would exceed minimum staffing levels under the current staffing pattern.

The objection from the administration was frankly baffling: they indicated that taxpayers would not be in support of incentivizing Communicators to pick up extra hours of additional overtime when the county could instead unilaterally force this unprecedented and massive disruption to employees' personal lives so that they could order more workers involuntarily to work extra hours. Not once was there an objection indicating that the county could not afford to incentivize these additional hours. The department is running multiple positions short; currently there are six positions (two Customer Support Specialists and four Crisis Counselors) which have been vacant since the start of the year; there are also nine (9) vacant Communicator positions currently. But even though the Communicators are picking up the workload of these 15 vacant positions, there is a confounding philosophical objection by the administration to this alternative approach of incentivizing workers to pick up additional shifts. Even when we indicated we could quickly initiate a brief trial period before incentives were approved to ensure there would indeed be sufficient staffing, there was no willingness from the administration to consider this alternative option.

We vehemently disagree with this perspective - government is not a business, and our 9-1-1 Communicators are not disposable commodities; they are human beings who have dedicated their careers to public service and to public safety, specifically the public safety of Dane County residents.

While the Public Protection and Judiciary Committee does not have the ability nor authority to direct the administration and/or department, you all are indeed elected to represent the constituents of Dane County and are in tune with the values of your districts and the residents you represent. Our Communicators believe our community views our frontline Communicators not as disposal commodities but also as fellow human beings. We believe our community recognizes that government is not a business and that our collective goal should be to provide quality public services to our community and maintain public safety, not pinch pennies. We believe the average Dane County resident would absolutely understand that incentivizing Communicators to work extra hours using the salary savings from fifteen vacant positions in the department is more than a reasonable investment in both the short-term immediate needs to meet minimum staffings this summer but also an investment in the long-term health of the department's workforce by avoiding the ultimate nuclear option of a mid-year shift selection.

It is with that goal that we intend to present to you the humanity of our 911 Communicators. At the meeting itself, you will hear from some of our Communicators directly; other Communicators have also shared written testimony they wish the committee to consider. To that end, the first written statement attached is from Communicator Hannah Thomas - she describes the sacrifices that Communicators already make for our community, and how they have consistently and constantly been asked to sacrifice more and more to an unsustainable degree.

As always, thank you for your consideration and your service.

Sincerely,

Derek Wallace
President, AFSCME Local 720

P.S. Please kindly attach this email and attachments to the minutes for tomorrow's meeting.

Hannah Thomas – June 24, 2024

I disapprove of midyear shift pick and vacation picks. It's extremely disruptive to many members of our population. I believe that if we continue down this path it will lead to more people leaving as well as more burnout.

Already I hear multiple people on the floor considering leaving- some of those are people who originally wanted to retire from here. Some are brand new people who are concerned that if this is allowed to continue, it means nothing is safe: they will never again trust a shift pick to be binding because it appears to them that things they depend on for family, childcare, appointments, hobbies, vacation, friends- all can be rescinded without warning. We work in a job with very little predictability and sanity and this takes away even more of what little we have left.

Personally I will be losing out on a lot of time with my young son and fiance. I will be going from 12 full weekends left in 2024 where I get to spend time with my child and partner to 4 weekends. Recuperation will also be diminished- it's a lot harder on mind and body when you work 4 shifts in a row, often all 12 hour days, only to get 2 days to recover. Our 10/12 hour shifts gave us the ability to pick up more overtime because we were better rested and willing to help.

One of the contentions I have heard is that we 'knew what we signed up for'-- that's hurtful to me. I signed up knowing I would work nights, weekends, holidays – but I also signed up for transparency, consistency, and support when I signed onto this job. I signed up for a job I knew would have overtime- but I don't agree that it means that my schedule can be unilaterally changed mid year after I've planned my whole life, or that myself and my coworkers should continue to bear the burden of problems we did not create, nor can solve. Every time we are told: the public needs us, our coworkers need us- we continue to be forced to work far more hours of overtime than the average person would find acceptable. When will it be enough?