May 28, 2019

The Honorable Lori Lightfoot
121 N. LaSalle Street
Chicago City Hall 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Lightfoot,

As leaders of Chicago’s hospitals and health systems, we offer our sincere congratulations on your inauguration as mayor, and we look forward to working with you on achieving your vision for protecting and improving the health and quality of life for all Chicagoans. In collaboration with you and your administration, hospitals and health systems have a critical role in strengthening and transforming health and healthcare in our city.

We want to bring to your attention an issue that we are deeply concerned about because we believe it would undermine the delivery of healthcare and jeopardize access to services in Chicago – the proposed “Fair Workweek” ordinance.

This restrictive scheduling proposal would require that employers provide employees with at least two weeks’ notice of their work schedules; pay employees extra money (“predictability pay”) when hours are added to the shift of an employee – if, for example, they have to replace a worker who quit without notice or called in sick; and provide employees with four hours of “predictability pay” when hours are cut from an employee’s shift.

This is the most aggressive, far-reaching restrictive scheduling proposal in the country, and the only one that would include hospitals. Hospitals are not like retail or fast food outlets – they provide life-saving care every hour of every day across Chicago, ensuring the health and well-being of patients. Hospitals must have the flexibility to align and deploy our healthcare employees to meet the unique needs and demands of our patients and communities.

The ordinance’s burdensome requirements are unworkable and impractical for hospitals given unpredictable and unplanned shifts in patient volumes and staffing needs. The ordinance would undermine the timely and efficient delivery of healthcare to patients, which it recognizes and acknowledges by exempting Cook County Health.
For example, if there were a major flu outbreak in Chicago, many hospitals would receive an influx of vulnerable pediatric and elderly patients needing critical care.

To ensure that the hospitals are fully staffed to meet this unplanned demand, additional nurses, technicians and support staff would be needed on very short notice.

But under the proposed ordinance, hospitals would be forced to pay a penalty for every employee who is called in or be short-staffed and risk the health and safety of our patients.

At an April City Council hearing on this issue, one Chicago hospital conservatively estimated that the “predictability pay” provisions could impact that hospital by more than $3 million annually – acting as an unfunded mandate that would increase healthcare costs for patients.

Hospitals are absolutely committed to helping low-wage workers start and advance their careers in healthcare, one of the best and fastest growing sectors in the local, state and national economies. In Chicago, our hospitals and health systems – including 17 safety net hospitals – are responsible for generating more than 130-thousand direct and indirect jobs. We offer stable employment opportunities and are uniquely positioned to take people from local neighborhoods, start them in entry-level positions, and help train and advance them to higher-level, higher-paying jobs.

For example, the Sinai Community Institute of Sinai Health System provides career counseling, occupational internships and training for adults on the city’s west and southwest sides; it also helped launch Sweet Beginnings, which has provided hundreds of jobs while reducing recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals.

Lurie Children’s Hospital, Rush University Medical Center, University of Chicago, and NorthShore University Health System have launched a program with Malcolm X College enabling entry-level hospital employees to become certified as registered medical assistants and phlebotomy technicians – which are among the fastest growing occupations in the country and are projected to grow by nearly 30 percent over the next 10 years.

Finally, we want to bring to your attention a recent survey conducted by a former pollster for President Obama, which found that Chicago workers who would be affected by the ordinance believe their schedules are not broken and strongly believe employers and employees should solve scheduling issues – not the City Council.

**Over eight in ten (83%) hourly workers** said they are satisfied with the amount of advance notice they currently receive at their jobs – regardless of the number of days in advance notice; **76% of workers** are satisfied with their ability to meet their scheduling needs, as well as the needs of their family; and **more than three-quarters (77%) of workers** are satisfied with their employer’s efforts to be flexible and support work-life balance.
Our hospitals are strongly committed to supporting our healthcare team members in providing a good and safe workplace environment so they can provide quality healthcare to all our patients. We work to make sure they have flexibility in their schedules and can work the shifts they want, as circumstances permit. But the Fair Workweek ordinance’s very restrictive requirements are unworkable for hospitals and the delivery of healthcare. We respectively urge you to protect healthcare for Chicagoans and exempt hospitals from the Fair Workweek ordinance proposal.

Sincerely,

A.J. Wilhelmi
President & CEO
Illinois Health and Hospital Association

Chicago Hospital Presidents and CEOs

Steven Airhart
Group Chief Executive Officer
Garfield Park Behavioral Hospital
Hartgrove Behavioral Health System

Ned Budd
President & CEO
Thorek Memorial Hospital

Richard Cerceo, MHA, FACHE, CHE
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Kindred Hospital Chicago North

Robert Dahl
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William Dorsey, MD
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Anthony Guaccio
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