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Oral Testimony of Nila Payton, Administrative Assistant in a pathology lab at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, House Judiciary Committee, Antitrust, Commercial, and Administrative Law Subcommittee “Reviving Competition, Part 4: 21st Century Antitrust Reforms and the American Worker”

Good Morning.

My name is Nila Payton. I’m an Administrative Assistant in the Pathology Department at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center’s (UPMC) Presbyterian Hospital. I want to start by thanking the Committee for inviting me to testify today.

I live in Pittsburgh with my two children. My older son, Ty-Jahn, goes to a Pittsburgh public school and my youngest, Roman, is in preschool. I do my best to keep up with school activities and participate in school board meetings because I want them to have a great, quality education.

I have worked at my UPMC job for almost 16 years. I trained for my job at the Bidwell Training Center where a lot of UPMC workers get the training they need to work in healthcare.

The pathology department is important to everything we do at UPMC. I make sure test requests and results get to the right place and I also make sure that our department remains HIPPA compliant. I have to understand the medical and legal terminology that my doctors use so I can be a strong part of the team in a busy medical department. I’m really good at my job and I love what I do. I have good relationships with everyone and I bring a positive attitude to work. I like knowing that my work helps sick people.

But my job does not pay what it should and I am not treated with the dignity and respect I deserve.

After 15 years on the job and several promotions, I make \$19.00 an hour. That might sound like a lot but the living wage for my family type in Pittsburgh is \$28.00/hour. People just starting in my position – or in similar roles such as patient care techs, environmental techs or transporters – make \$15.00 an hour.

Most UPMC workers I know struggle to make ends meet. Our medical insurance is very expensive – and we are required to use UPMC medical facilities. I have medical debt to my employer, and so do many of my coworkers. Most of us make just too much to qualify for medical assistance. That means we skip or postpone treatment because the bills are just too high.

Management knows we are struggling. They sometimes send us tips for stretching our budget. One time they told us to save on transportation costs by riding our bikes to work, something I

do not plan to do in the snow. We also have an internal UPMC foodbank. Where is the dignity in that?

As for respect, here's an example of how little UPMC thinks we are worth: In the last big wave of the pandemic, I told my manager that workers wanted better PPE and information so we could stay safe in the hospital. I also thought we should get hazard pay. My manager told me that because I work in healthcare, I signed up for this and I should stop complaining. I'm sorry, but nowhere in any of my orientation did it mention putting my life on the line. I understand that we have to make the hospital run even in a pandemic, but "You signed up for this." is not the right answer. The right answer is, "Your life is valuable. Let's do everything in our power to make sure you are informed and safe." UPMC did not even apply for the hazard pay that the state was offering to employers.

Sometimes people ask me "Why don't you just get another job if you don't like the one you have?"

This is where you need to understand just how big UPMC is.

Two decades ago, there was no UPMC. Pittsburgh had many independent hospitals and those hospitals competed for workers, so potential employees could pick the best place for them based on salary, location, treatment etc. But over the past 20 years, UPMC has grown from one hospital – Western Psych – to become a 23 billion dollar company. It now owns Mercy, Presbyterian, Montefiore, Shadyside, Children's, Magee, McKeesport and St Margaret's and that's just in the Pittsburgh area. We all work for the same corporation so what's the point of going from Presbyterian to Magee? There is almost nowhere else to work if you are a healthcare worker.

But UPMC is so big that they actually affect the whole labor market even outside of healthcare.

Last week, I looked at administrative assistant jobs offered not at UPMC. There were 800 of them in our region. I eliminated the part-time jobs and then all the jobs that paid the same or less than mine. There were 40 left. Then I eliminated the night shift jobs because I have children and also the jobs that are so far away you'd need to have a car. There were just two jobs left.

UPMC employs 92,000 workers. Nobody else has enough jobs to force UPMC to compete for employees. Instead, UPMC sets the ceiling for everybody.

That's why leaving UPMC is not a realistic path to a better life in Pittsburgh. Leaving UPMC just means we have to start all over again and maybe have to leave the city and my community. Instead, I want to work to improve the job I have. I want to improve all the jobs that thousands of my UPMC coworkers have.

Two generations ago, Pittsburgh had an employer that was as big and impactful as UPMC. It was called US Steel. Instead of a worker starting at \$15.00, a worker started their first day at

over \$21.00 (in today's money) and went up from there. A steelworker with my years of service would be vested in a pension and be making \$33.00/hour. The difference was that workers at US Steel had a union. And so US Steel - even though it was big - could not make all the decisions on its own about pay and working conditions. When a big employer has to bargain with workers, they can't use their size to keep pay down.

But UPMC knows that it can keep pay down and disrespect its workers because we have few employment alternatives. That is why I am fighting for a union. I am fighting to make UPMC jobs good jobs for everyone.

Thank you for listening.