

8th February 2023

Cathaoirleach and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kevin Figgis, and I am the Divisional Organiser in the SIPTU Health Division. I am accompanied this morning by my colleague, John McCamley, who is the national official within our union for our membership within health professions such as radiography, radiation therapy, phlebotomy, nursing and midwifery.

On behalf of the SIPTU Health Division, we welcome the invitation to meet with you today. Our division represents over 41,000 members within both public and private settings. Our membership includes the widest scope of grades within the health service including health professionals, health care assistants, nurses and midwives, support staff and the National Ambulance Service (NAS). Our union is a strong voice within the ICTU Staff Panel of Health Unions and the Health Service Union representatives on the National Joint Council.

We have provided a detailed submission to you today which seeks to highlight key issues for our members on the welfare and safety of healthcare workers within the public health system. We have demonstrated these issues in four sections:

- The need for safe staffing levels for all grades and departments to ensure healthcare workers are best placed to provide for the needs of patients and service users in the evolving model of healthcare we have today. Safe staffing levels should be determined by the needs of the department and not solely on the budget allocated.
- We have provided statistical data on the incidence of assaults in the workplace on our members and the unequal treatment of benefits which are afforded to support workers by their employer, even if they are assaulted in the same incident as other grades of staff. For the purpose of support after an assault in the workplace, support workers are classed as non-officers and are therefore distinguished at a lower rate of benefit than other grades deemed to be of officer status. The continued use of these types of policies is shameful on the Health Service Executive and Department of Health and must stop.
- We have outlined the activity our union has had in representing members through an investigation under the Dignity at Work policy. We have also provided a detailed report on the national review of the policy and the National Investigations Unit jointly undertaken by the Group of Unions with the Health Service Executive (HSE).
- Finally, we have outlined the deep concern of our union, and I know those of our fellow union colleagues, with the situation in which healthcare workers suffering from the effects of 'Long Covid' are left due to the cessation of the specific support scheme by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. There was no consultation with the unions in advance of the cessation of the scheme. The HSE has stated it has no mandate to engage on a replacement scheme due to having no authority to do so and the Department of Health has also refused to engage to date. The Group of Unions has referred this matter to the Workplace Relations

Commission (WRC). However, no offer for a date for conciliation has been offered at this time.

Our union has chosen these topics for discussion within our submission as they broadly represent a significant percentage of the issues raised by our membership within the health service. It is essential we do all we can to ensure that healthcare workers feel valued for their work looking after the sick and vulnerable in our society.

We look forward to the engagement with you today and are happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.

Kevin Figgis