

March 26, 2020

## **Pennsylvania's Government is Failing its Workforce**

Over the past few weeks, as Pennsylvania has responded to the coronavirus pandemic, many employers have taken aggressive steps to ensure the safety of their workforce. Some state agencies and county governments have adjusted their operations to meet federal CDC guidelines, developed transparent COVID-19 policies, and taken other actions to ensure that they can continue to serve the public.

But many more employers have done too little, and moved too slowly to protect their employees. We're calling on all employers, especially those in the public sector, to take immediate action to protect essential personnel. State agencies, county and municipal governments, and nonprofits must accelerate their timetables for implementing telework options, ensure all of its facilities are professionally cleaned immediately and regularly, increase staggered shifts to all offices regardless of staff size, and take all other necessary measures to protect the hardworking staff. Not gradually over time. Immediately.

We've learned that several SEIU Local 668 members, including those working for Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services, have now tested positive for the coronavirus. "This is not acceptable," SEIU Local 668 president Steve Catanese said Thursday. "We've been going in circles with DHS for weeks, doing everything we could to get them to limit the exposure to our members. We knew that, at some point, this virus was going to reach our workers, and we wanted DHS to be prepared--to have all offices professionally cleaned, to have skeleton crews in the office, and to have folks teleworking to continue to renew and review applications. But DHS has not moved quickly enough. I'm furious that our own members are now having to battle this extremely aggressive virus. This could have been prevented."

Public and human service employees understand the vital role they play in ensuring that Pennsylvanians have the resources and support they need. This pandemic has made their roles ever more critical. We need a safe and healthy public workforce to help the millions of Pennsylvanians who are affected by this crisis. We're calling on all employers to close all worksites that have positive cases of COVID-19, have them all professionally cleaned according to CDC standards, and allow workers to telework until this pandemic is over. And we demand that if they have not already done so, they adjust their operations immediately to adhere to CDC guidelines on COVID-19 spread prevention now.

SEIU Local 668 has advised, and continues to advise, all of our members to take all necessary measures to protect their health and safety in accordance with their employment contract, and

within the confines of the law. We further ask them and all members of the public to call upon all of Pennsylvania's public officials to address this growing crisis today. Not tomorrow. Today.