

## V2DRAFT Dionne Gary Testimony

Testimony of President Dionne Gary

Before the Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Committee

May 14, 2025

Good afternoon Chairperson Miller, members of the committee, and distinguished guests,

My name is Dionne Gary, and I am proud to serve as the President of AFSCME District 1199C, NUHHCE. I have the distinct honor of being the first Black woman to lead this union, which represents healthcare and childcare professionals across Philadelphia and its surrounding counties. I come before you not only as a labor leader, but as a lifelong Philadelphian, a mother, and a passionate advocate for the safety and dignity of every worker in this Commonwealth.

Our union represents those who care for our sick, our children, our elderly—those whose hands do the healing, nurturing, and comforting work that keeps our communities whole. These workers are the backbone of Pennsylvania’s care infrastructure. And yet, too many of them labor without the protections they deserve. That’s why I’m here today in strong support of House Bills 308, 812, 926, and 956.

House Bill 308 is about equity and accountability. It would finally extend OSHA-level safety protections to public employees in Pennsylvania. Right now, many of our members working in public facilities—mental health centers, long-term care homes, public hospitals—are excluded from the standards that private-sector employees rely on. That’s unacceptable. Safety is not a privilege—it’s a basic right. This bill levels the playing field and brings much-needed oversight and resources to ensure that every public worker can come home safe at the end of their shift.

House Bill 812 tackles a crisis we can no longer ignore: violence against hospital workers. Violence should never be part of the job description. And yet, I hear from members weekly who’ve been kicked, punched, threatened, and traumatized while simply trying to do their jobs. HB 812 would provide grants to hospitals for training and violence prevention, enabling them to proactively create safer environments. Prevention shouldn’t be optional—it should be funded, required, and prioritized.

House Bill 926 works hand in hand with HB 812 by requiring the creation of violence prevention committees in healthcare facilities. These aren’t just bureaucratic boxes to check. These are real structures where labor and management can come together to identify risks, create policies, and protect staff. When workers have a seat at the table, safety solutions become smarter, faster, and more effective.

And finally, House Bill 956 sends a clear message: violence against healthcare workers is a serious crime, and it must be treated as such. Expanding the definition of aggravated assault to include attacks on healthcare workers will serve both as a deterrent and a recognition of the severity of the harm these acts cause—not just physically, but emotionally and psychologically.

As someone who began organizing in 2000 at Hahnemann Hospital, and who's stood beside workers in arbitration rooms, contract fights, and hospital hallways, I can tell you—these bills are not theoretical. They are desperately needed, right now, in facilities all across this state.

I also serve as Vice President on the Executive Board of the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO, as Executive Vice President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, and as a proud member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. In all of these roles, I carry with me the voices of workers—especially Black and brown women in care roles—who are too often unheard, overworked, and under-protected.

Passing these bills is more than good policy—it is an act of justice.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to those who care for all of us.