Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Committee

Friday, July 31, 2026

Testimony from Wendell Young IV, President of UFCW Local 1776

Good morning.

I would like to thank the members of the PA Senate Democratic Policy Committee, Chairman Nick Miller and Leader Jay Costa for holding this hearing today.

We welcome the opportunity to testify before this committee to discuss the real-life impacts of failed economic policies coming out of the White House and our federal government. Specifically, we want to highlight a number of examples on how these policies are impacting production costs of food, diminishing workforce compliments and driving up consumer prices for every single one of your constituents.

Our testimony will highlight a few topics:

1. Impact of tariffs on production costs and workforce
2. Failed immigration policy impacting food production facilities
3. Future SNAP cut impacts on consumer prices

Before we dive into each of these topics, there is one common denominator for each of topic that is a major reason for increased costs for consumers and employers: uncertainty.

Employers like certainty. We represent nearly 30,000 workers in about 100 different collective bargaining agreements. We engage on a daily basis with employers to discuss their business models, how our members can share in their success and the future of their companies. One thing we know is that employers forecast, model and project based on an understanding of what things cost, what the economy looks like and how to project that moving forward.

The constant carousel of what is subject to tariffs and what isn't, the lack of guidance from Department of Homeland Security on what class of immigrant workers are allowed to stay in our country or not, and the modeling on how the "Big Beautiful Bill" will impact SNAP benefits for Pennsylvania consumers all contribute to this uncertainty.

Employers' natural reaction when they do not have a full scope of what the economic environment is moving forward is to do the following: shrink costs, reduce workforce and increase prices. They prepare for the worst. And unfortunately, the worst is happening.

On tariffs, many of our members are experiencing first-hand impacts of this reckless trade policy. The Trump tariffs have led to plant closures, job loss, hours reductions, wage stagnation and hiring freezes. A few examples of this are:

- JBS Souderton: this is a large-scale beef slaughterhouse that is planning to close on August 14th where we represent 1,400 members. Increased costs related to transportation and inconsistent federal trade policies contributed to the company's decision. Chaotic immigration policies have contributed to tremendous uncertainty for hundreds working in the plant.
- Post Consumer Brands: our members work at a Pet Food processing facility in Bloomsburg, PA. Post management laid off more than 100 of our members working in wet food production due in large part to increased costs of cans to package the product. These cost increases are due to federal tariff policies.
- Knouse Foods: Knouse Foods is a co-op operating 3 factories in Central PA. They are experiencing an extreme difficulties sourcing apples and other fruit due to agricultural and transportation challenges caused by the Administration's policies. This has led to huge cost increases, loss of customers and the decision to close the Chambersburg, PA processing facility.
- Hershey Company: we represent the workers in the Hazleton plant. Hershey estimated in 2025 an additional $170-$180 million cost related to tariffs, specifically due to record high cocoa costs.

We could keep listing numerous examples where we represent workers such as Hanover Foods, Cove Shoe and even small businesses like Coffee Tree Roasters right here in Allegheny County which have all indicated to our union that extreme hardships have been placed on them due to federal tariff policies. Many other employers have broadly communicated the same and we see it at the bargaining table every day.

As it relates to immigration policy, the Trump Administration's reckless and inhumane approach is a terrible and unethical gut punch to our immigrant workforce here in Pennsylvania. It also impacts production costs and consumer prices.

As many of you know, food and meat production is a highly diverse workforce. Many immigrant workers – especially workers we represent – are employed in meatpacking and food processing facilities with various work statuses. The most common are TPS (Temporary Protected Status) or various parolee programs.

These programs have existed for decades and have allowed immigrants to come to this country – legally – and contribute to our growing workforce in essential industries. There is no better example of this than the pandemic, where immigrant workers through TPS or parolee programs, kept our country running by showing up to work every day in these challenging worksites so food could be on the grocery store shelves for our families.

How were they rewarded? We have seen reckless and immediate revocations by the Trump Administration to eliminate their statuses, causing numerous lawsuits that put their ability to remain in the United States in danger. This has meant unwarranted hardships for these workers who fear now for their livelihoods and the safety for their families.

In addition to the inhumane part of this, these reckless policies put extreme stress on this sector and the existing workforce in these facilities. Removing large numbers of workers who have TPS statuses puts employers and remaining employees in a financial and operational crunch: reducing productivity, increasing employee turnover and decreasing efficiency. This all contributes to increased costs.

Finally, the Big Beautiful Bill cuts tens of billions of dollars from SNAP over the next decade. This alone will cause price chaos in the retail grocery industry. Retail grocery employers model their sales and track foot traffic. Every single employer we have talked to has indicated these SNAP cuts will cost their business model in both sales and foot traffic.

What does this mean?

You can guess it. We will see more price increases on retail grocery shelves in the future. Layoffs, hiring freezes and wage stagnation will continue in an already traditional low-wage sector. Consumers will feel this price impact immediately, workers will be left in the dust, and taxpayers will shoulder the burden with increased public assistance costs.

In conclusion, this is the story that needs to be told about how our federal government is creating chaos and increasing costs for working families in Pennsylvania and our country. Workers at a time like this need to unite and partner with elected officials who see a different vision than the reckless decisions the White House is currently making.

We appreciate your time and are happy to answer any questions.