

Testimony- New York City Council
Joint Hospitals and Health Committees
Oversight – Vaccine Hesitancy and Equity in NYC
Clerical-Administrative Employees Local 1549
By Ralph Palladino, 2nd Vice President
for President Eddie Rodriguez
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Local 1549 represents 14000 employees of the City of New York in all agencies, the New York Police Department (NYPD), New York Health and Hospitals (NYC H+H) and the Metro Plus HMO. Our members perform front line duties in most agencies directly face to face with the public, by phone/texting in Call Centers and in back offices away from the public.

Local 1549 believes that the safety and health of all those who work for the city should be protected. This includes those who are vaccinated. The health and safety of the public and our members is our concern. The entire Executive Board of Local 1549 is vaccinated.

We do not support the politicking of not getting vaccinated for the alleged “constitutional freedom” to refuse vaccination. All workers and the public must be kept safe at worksites.

We do know that vaccinations work, and the risks are extremely minimal. Religious and medical reasons for not getting vaccinated can be reasonable.

The state could allow NYC H+H to reassign personnel who are not being vaccinated, mandate they wear masks and get tested regularly instead of termination. This is what they already do to those who refuse the influenza vaccine.

We do believe vaccinations are key in defeating this pandemic. We also believe that clean, adequately ventilated worksites with systems that have MERV 13 filters, masking in all common and shared spaces, and safe distancing of at least three feet are also extremely important.

A large portion of Local 1549 members in agencies where they were required to work normal work week schedules at the worksite throughout the pandemic. They include NYC H+H, NYPD and DOITT-311. In some other agencies they were required to rotate working at their office and from home.

There are roughly thirteen hundred 911 operators in the NYPD. Two hundred and thirty nine of them contracted COVID and three died. While no one knows how and where these workers contracted COVID it is certainly possible they did so on the job. It is impossible to socially distance at the Call Centers. The NYPD has worked with the Local and DC 37 in making the centers as safe as possible.

DOITT-311 has the same issues of not being able to properly distance due to the configuration of their worksites.

NYC H+H has worked cooperatively with Local 1549 in dealing with the safety and health of our clerical members including proper PPE’s, many of whom work on the front lines in the ER, ICUs, Ambulatory Care, Outpatient Financial Counselling, etc.

We believe that these employees along with those performing eligibility duties in SNAP, HASA and Medicaid Recertifications who perform duties face to face with the public are heroes in the pandemic fight.

In the Office of Payroll Administration (OPA) our payroll members made sure all city employees were paid on time throughout the pandemic. They did so mainly from their offices.

All these public service workers who worked during the pandemic from their offices in unsafe conditions, whether in emergency services or not, deserve to receive the PREMIUM PAY promised and paid for by the federal government for such work but unfairly is being withheld by the city

The main issues that are universal for Local 1549 are:

- 1- ventilation inadequacies. The latter being most problematic given how COVID can be spread. No one can answer the question of whether the ventilation systems have been cleaned properly and continue to be monitored and cleaned regularly. In addition, no one can answer what the MERV rating is in each work site's ventilation system in all the offices including in the NYPD and DOITT 311.
- 2- Lack of enforcement of required masking, regardless of vaccination status, in all common or shared spaces.
- 3- Social distancing requirements are not enforced.
- 4- Absence of clear and consistent communication of policies relating to COVID.
- 5- Legitimate questions about having to return to work areas daily in areas where productivity was not reduced by COVID when performing work duties from home. Members feel they are being placed in way needlessly.

REPORTS FROM SOME CITY AGENCIES

I refer you to the reports received from three agencies that worked from home during the pandemic and the current situation which is problematic. Ironically, one is from the Department of Environmental Protections. They are as follows:

MOST COMMON COMPLAINT FROM ALL AGENCIES

Employees are receiving requests for Medical information by people they do not know. So members feel their rights to confidentiality are being violated.

REPORT FROM DEPT OF SOCIAL SERVICES-HRA

Early on the staff representatives were in the rushed RTO walk-throughs. There were safety measures put in place by facilities so that our members returned to a safe clean (somewhat anyway) environment i.e., the physical distancing and directional markers on the floors, physical distancing in the laboratories, pantry, lounges, lunchrooms, and conference rooms.

Most of those safety measures have been removed since the mayor's order for staff to return to the office at 100%.

The trains and buses that our members must utilize to get to and from work locations daily are as crowded as they were pre-Covid.

Members have returned with high anxiety as the fear mongering continues leaving many in a state of confusion as to how to deal with these issues, they now face daily for both the vaxed and un-vaxed.

Other venues have returned bringing scores of people in crowds (only for those who are vaxed) yet there are many who have been fully vaxed that are still being hospitalized and some who have died, leading to further confusion.

HRA – SNAP-HASA- MEDICAID RECERTS.

Members issues about the RTO are as follows:

- Air quality in some locations (100%)
- No RTO walk-through (in various locations)
- Removal of CDC physical distancing 6ft guidelines
- Lack of high touch surface cleaning
- Absence of management staff (most are still working from home)
- Lack of vacation schedule process
- Lack of clear direction from management
- Poor communication from management
- Overtime mandates creating safety issues for members leaving sites late to complete mandated O/T
- Managements negative harsh treatment continues (even for those managers who have not returned)
- Members are unclear as to how to move forward to do their jobs in some centers where they engage clients
- Issues with child-care when there are classroom/school closures (management lack of knowledge when it comes to FFCRA provision)
- Crowded elevators (no physical distancing)
- Some locations are just filthy (vermin & dust)

REPORT FROM DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- The concern has been around social distancing or more accurately the lack of it.
- There is not enough plexiglass, and they refuse to add more.
- Complaints from people who were not informed about whether someone who works in close vicinity has recently tested positive for covid.
- We share the building at 59-17 Junction Blvd and 96-05 Horace Harding with police officers and other tenants that do not wear masks or are not mandated to do so. We share elevators and bathrooms with such tenants. Many DEP employees are upset and do not feel comfortable in this environment.

After working from home and knowing that we can get the job done, members at DEP are upset that we are not at least employing a hybrid work commute system where we spend some days at home and some days at work. We know that 100% capacity at work is unnecessary, and some people have two fares or three fares in their commute on crowded public transportation.

REPORT FROM NYPD-Precincts

Uniformed officers and supervisors are walking around unmasked. It is not known who is vaccinated and who is not.

ASK

We hope that the city administration and the City Council consider our report and fix what is broken in the system. Our safety, health and lives of our public services workers and the public is at risk if they are not.

THANK YOU

