



Representative C. Allison Russo
The Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the House Health Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding HCR 17 with my colleague and joint sponsor, Representative Sobecki.

In January 2019, approximately 65% of the faculty at Wright State University, which include some of my constituents who commute from the western side of Franklin County, went on strike for a three-week period. At the time, Wright State University's administration was under multiple state and federal investigations and had overspent \$130 million for consultants and revenue-seeking ventures, putting the university at risk of being under state fiscal watch. The university was seeking to make up some of the funds through the faculty contract negotiations. After 18 months of intense negotiations, the university administrators offered faculty a contract that increased the workload dramatically, put raises on hold, tied merit pay to subjective criteria, and denied faculty the ability to bargain over health insurance. By proposing to remove bargaining abilities for health care in the new contract, faculty were worried that the costs of health care would skyrocket beyond their means and force some of them to declare bankruptcy. Out of over 500 union faculty members, 85% of them voted to go on strike.

The three-week strike period was a time of intense stress and uncertainty amongst the faculty: they received no pay from the university, health insurance was uncertain, and there was no known deadline for the strike's conclusion. For many faculty members with families and young children, the ability to pay their existing bills and afford food with no pay was extremely difficult and forced many to rely on food banks and the donations of neighbors and extended family.

House Concurrent Resolution 17 is simple in its intent: it calls upon Congress to extend SNAP eligibility to include the households of striking workers. Because current federal law does not allow households that include striking workers to qualify for SNAP benefits, other members of the household, including children, are potentially condemned to suffer unnecessarily from food insecurity during labor disputes. This is especially concerning, since research shows SNAP support — even short-term — improves learning, health, and economic benefits for families and their children.

For striking workers with school-aged children, access to emergency SNAP benefits also means automatic access to free- and reduced-lunch, as well as free breakfast if offered, in their schools. A consistent, adequate, healthy diet supplies good nutrition, forming a crucial foundation for a child's growth. By nourishing a child's body and brain, he or she can develop skills crucial to later life success, including memory, emotional stability, and social skills. Most



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importantly, SNAP participation during times of economic hardship can mitigate the effects of stress on children's emotional and behavioral problems thanks to its ability to quickly respond during periods of lost income.

Striking is a last resort for workers but sometimes the only tool for employees to balance the power difference between workers and employers when there are disputes over pay, benefits, and better working conditions. When workers are able to organize and negotiate higher wages, safer working conditions, and better retirement and health benefits, more Ohioans are self-sufficient and able to support their families and live the American dream right here at home. Additionally, better worker pay and benefits mean Ohio's long-term state spending on social services such as Medicaid, disability, unemployment, and intervention services are decreased. Urging federal action to remove barriers to food security for striking workers is one simple step this body can take to show our constituents we support Ohio's workers and their ability to organize and negotiate better conditions.

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify. Representative Sobecki and I are happy to answer any additional questions the committee might have. Thank you.