



New York State
**PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
FEDERATION AFL-CIO**
1168-70 Troy-Schenectady Road
P.O. Box 12414
Albany, NY 12212-2414

(518) 785-1900
(800) 342-4306
Fax (518) 785-1814

VIA EMAIL AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

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October 29, 2020

Howard Zucker, M.D.
Commissioner,
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza
Albany NY 12237

Dear Commissioner Zucker:

I write to bring your attention to an issue involving the Department of Epidemiology, which consists of PEF members who supply data and information to your office; this data is also used by the governor and administration officials.

Members of this department report that they have been working 12-15 hours a day, six days a week since January – nearly 11 months. That by itself is unsustainable. But I have also learned from local leaders that on their one day off per week, these employees are on call and required to respond to work-related matters, which essentially means they have been working seven days a week for nearly a year.

Aside from the fact that PEF's contract clearly stipulates a five-day work week, many would consider this inhumane and cruel. This week, a conversation was held with local PEF leaders, DOH and management as to how to get some relief for these employees. PEF recommends that individual schedules or shifts be rotated such that everyone is able to have two days off, in keeping with our contract and standard labor practice in the United States.

I am calling on you to have compassion for these workers and I request a meeting to discuss possible solutions. While we all understand that we are dealing with a pandemic, we must respect humane limits on the amount of work expected from employees, especially those delivering essential services. Having people work six days a week for such an extended time, without even the guarantee of one full day's rest, increases the risk of critical errors in the data they produce, which in turn could endanger public trust in this data, or public health itself.

I look forward to working with you toward a resolution of this matter that protects both the mission-critical workers PEF represents, and the citizens of New York.

Sincerely,

Wayne Spence
President
NYS Public Employees Federation