

The Aging Workforce: What Does It Mean for Businesses and the Economy?
Testimony of Javon R. Bea, President and CEO of Mercy Health System
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1. Thank you, Senator Kohl, for the opportunity to discuss the impact of the aging workforce on today's businesses. My name is Javon Bea and I am president and CEO of Mercy Health System, based out of Janesville, Wisconsin. Mercy operates 63 facilities throughout 24 southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois communities.
2. Last fall, Mercy Health System was ranked number one on the AARP Best Employers for Workers Over 50 list, an honor received because of the unique programs we offer to our older workers.
3. Mercy Health System employs 3,856 workers. Of those, 28% are over the age of 50, and we expect this number to grow in the coming years, as the shortage of qualified health care workers continues to grow.
4. A decade ago when analyzing the impending shortage of health care workers, we knew we needed to put programs in place to recruit and retain older workers.
5. When talking to our mature employees, we find that what they want most in a job is flexibility... time off to travel, volunteer and be with family.
 - And so we continue to develop flexible work schedules and benefits to meet their needs.
 - In return, Mercy is able to recruit and retain a large percentage of older workers, who bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their jobs.
6. One of our most popular benefits is our "Work to Retire" program, which allows employees over age 50 the opportunity to work reduced hours, pool, or work-at-home schedules.
 - It also allows employees age 55 and older the ability to work seasonally, for 1,000 hours a year at their discretion, while still maintaining benefits for the entire year.
 - Thus, they could choose to work full-time for six months, then take six months off to travel, live part of the year in a warmer climate, spend time with their families, or whatever they may choose, while still receiving Mercy benefits.
7. We have also invested over a quarter million dollars in a low lift program, which has placed assistive lifting devices at all of our hospitals to aid older workers when they need to lift patients. This equipment helps them avoid injury, keeping them in the workforce longer.

8. Throughout the years, we have found that older workers have a stronger connection to the significance of their work and our organizational mission than do younger employees.
 - Many older workers are no longer working as much for the money as they are working to make a contribution to society.
 - They want to make a positive difference in the lives of others.
9. In addition, they bring years of experience to their jobs, serving as effective mentors and role models to younger employees, bringing loyalty, dedication and responsibility to the workplace.
10. As a business, offering programs to retain older workers has proven to be a successful decision.
11. I am in full support of the Older Worker Opportunity Act, and applaud Senator Kohl and the Special Committee on Aging.
 - This bill will encourage more businesses to follow Mercy's successful lead in creating expanded work options for older Americans.
 - Providing programs that persuade older workers to stay in the workforce longer is a win-win situation for both older workers and employers alike.
12. Thank you again for inviting me to speak on this important topic.