

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR: Friday, September 8, 2017

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With Pepper Spray In-Hand, Workers to Head Back to Work Following a Two-Day Strike That Saw Thousands of Riverside County Workers Walk Off the Job to Protest the County's Labor Law Violations and Chronic Safety Breaches

With A Whopping 19 Labor Law Violations Still Stacked Up Against Riverside County, Union Representing Striking Workers Urges County to Come Back to The Table; Workers Forced to Rely On Pepper Spray Until Riverside County Opts to Participate in a Fair and Transparent Process Where Both Patient and Employee Safety Can Be Properly Addressed

Riverside, CA—Thousands of workers across Riverside County are set to return to work wearing “Stronger Than Ever” stickers, and those working in Riverside’s especially dangerous flagship hospital will walk back to work equipped with pepper spray.

After a powerful worker strike that garnered the support of California’s top three gubernatorial candidates and allowed workers to take a first step in flexing their collective power, SEIU Local 721, representing over 7,000 Riverside County workers, urges Riverside County officials to return to the bargaining table. The SEIU 721 bargaining team is willing and ready to bargain around the clock negotiations to move Riverside County in the right direction.

MEDIA AVAILABILITY AT RUHS:

Who: Riverside County Workers

What: Health Care Providers Returning Back to Work

When: Friday, September 8, 2017 at 6:45 a.m.

Hospital Shift Change happens right at 7 a.m.

**Where: Riverside County Administration Center
4080 Lemon St., Riverside CA 92501**

RUHS has been a focal point for months, as reports of physical attacks and the confiscation of deadly weapons by hospital staff have gone unaddressed, including an incident where Registered Nurse Teri Lopez had her head violently slammed into the ground repeatedly by a patient. Fear that the increasingly violent attacks may lead to a death on the job, hospital employees have organized self-defense classes and are now carrying pepper spray.

Their powerful two-day strike is a direct result of the County *racking up an incredible 19 labor law violations* throughout the bargaining process, stemming from the surveillance and harassment of County employees and their refusal to be transparent about critical information regarding their use of millions in taxpayer dollars.

Riverside County officials have been heavily criticized for their reckless revenue waste, including *spending over \$140 million in taxpayer dollars on consulting contracts and a toxic Wall Street swap deal*, while the demands of workers and residents for an investment in vital public services continue to be ignored.

In addition to urging County back to the bargaining table, SEIU 721 will be requesting mediation as another avenue to resolve vital issues impacting the public services Riverside County residents depend on.

Background:

Revenue Waste

Time and time again, Riverside county has chosen to sacrifice vital public services and its frontline civil servants to balance budgets, while continuing to squander millions of taxpayer dollars on sweetheart consulting contracts and millions more on a toxic swap deal they have yet to renegotiate.

The additional \$40 million recently given to KPMG consulting firm received criticism even from County Supervisor Kevin Jeffries who told the Press Enterprise:

“Seeking external evaluations can be a valuable tool to make the needed changes. But when the bill due for those external evaluators actually starts costing you the loss of services to the public, you have to question who’s being served — the taxpayers or the consulting firm?”

“It is very clear to me,” Jeffries added. “That the additional \$20 million we are going to pay KPMG is going to come from taxpayer funds that could otherwise be used to pay for essential public services. This is happening at a time when we need every dollar we can find.”

At the end of the day, while lucrative consulting contracts are being expanded, vital public services are being shortchanged and public frontline workers are being asked to go without the additional resources needed to meet the public’s needs and to retain and recruit skilled service providers.

On the “swap deal,” approved by a body of Board of Supervisors that included Supervisor John Tavaglione, the County was sold on the idea of an interest rate swap as a means of achieving a

lower “synthetic” fixed rate than could be achieved by issuing plain vanilla fixed-rate bonds. Riverside County was not alone in being duped into these swap deals; other municipalities like the City of Richmond, the City of San Francisco, and Jefferson County in Alabama also made similar dealings.

As a result of entering into this bad deal, the County has already paid \$48.9 million in excessive fees and is on the hook for up to \$20.5 million more until the deal ends in 2032, totaling a possible \$69.4 million in wasted taxpayer money. At the time the County considered this deal, it could have issued variable rate debt with no swap and saved up to \$69.4 million in bank fees over the life of this bad deal.

Unlike Riverside County, the City of Richmond, the City of San Francisco, and Jefferson County in Alabama have all successfully renegotiated the terms of their bank deals. To date, there is no record of the Riverside County CEO attempting to renegotiate the toxic swap deal with Wells Fargo in order to save millions that could be used for critical County services.

Safety Breaches

In response to increasingly dangerous working conditions that have been continually ignored by Riverside County management, this past April Riverside County employees hosted three days of self-defense classes at worksites across the County to equip workers with the skills needed to stay safe on the job.

The self-defense classes came as a result of an assault against a nurse at the Riverside University Hospital, where a patient repeatedly slammed the nurse’s head on the ground and attempted to bite her on the back of her neck until a co-worker came to her defense. Nurses at the flagship hospital, health clinics and incarceration facilities regularly endure a working environment where patients can be mentally unstable, suicidal, or homicidal – making basic safety measures indispensable.

Videos and articles documenting the worker’s plight against unsafe working condition and their calls on Riverside County Officials: Thousands Deliver Petitions, We Must Protect Ourselves, KPDK Coverage, Riverside County Employees Resort to Self Defense

Riverside County management responded to the worker-organized self-defense classes with the surveillance of workers during their break time, breaking labor law to harass and spy on County employees even as deadly weapons continue to be confiscated by nurses at the hospital.

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