

Media Advisory for Tuesday, November 27, 2018

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L.A. COUNTY NURSES TO GO ON 4-DAY STRIKE, CITING NON-STOP TITLE 22 LABOR LAW NURSE-TO-PATIENT RATIO VIOLATIONS

Strike for Patient Safety to Affect 7,000+ Nurses at L.A. County's Major Public Hospitals and Clinics; At Heart of Strike Is Chronic Retention Crisis in Busiest ERs, Trauma Centers; 5K+ Patients in One Year Leave LAC+USC Without Being Seen as 1K+ Nurse Positions Stay Vacant Despite Ample Funding to Fill Them

LOS ANGELES, CA—More than 7,000 Registered Nurses represented by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 721 are moving forward on Tuesday with a four-day Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike that is poised to dramatically impact Los Angeles County's public healthcare delivery system by focusing attention on continued, unaddressed threats to patient safety at the county's flagship hospitals. The labor impasse stems from a chronic Nurse retention crisis caused not by a lack of resources but sheer managerial intransigence, with more than 1,000 Nurse positions remaining vacant despite receiving full funding by the Board of Supervisors.

WHO: Striking Nurses of LA County

WHAT: Strike Actions at Various Public Hospitals Throughout LA County

WHEN: Tuesday, November 27, 2018

- * 7 A.M. to 8:30 A.M. – Strike Actions at Public Hospitals
 - * 10 A.M. to Noon – Nurses' Testimony to the LA County Board of Supervisors
 - * 2:30 P.M. to 5 A.M. on Wednesday, November 28 – Strike Actions at Public Hospitals
- (Daytime visuals will feature picket signs, banners and striking nurses in scrubs. Nighttime visuals also will include strikers with glow sticks and LED light up whistles.)**

WHERE: Public Hospitals Across LA County

- * LAC+USC Medical Center, 2051 Marengo St., Los Angeles, CA 90033
 - * Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, 1000 W. Carson St., Torrance, CA 90509
 - * Olive View-UCLA Medical Center, 14445 Olive View Dr., Sylmar, CA 91342
 - * Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, 7601 E. Imperial Hwy., Downey, CA 90242
 - * High Desert Regional Health Center, 335 E. Avenue I, Lancaster, CA 93535
- (Strike actions at various community clinics will be announced.)**

LA County Registered Nurses form part of a highly skilled set of health care providers at the county's extensive public hospital and clinic network, and they are vital to the health of 11 million people in LA County. Unfortunately, the Department of Health Services is continually failing to retain these Nurses; between fiscal year 2016 and fiscal year 2018 alone, 1,671 RNs vacated their county position, taking critical years of training experience at the expense of public tax dollars with them. The impact of the

revolving door is evident in key departments, including the county's Emergency Rooms, where RNs handle more than 300,000 ER visits annually. As an example, in the last three years while LAC+USC Medical Center's ER department hired 100 new RNs, it also lost 66 RNs in that same period. The revolving door robs patients of experienced care and saddles experienced RNs with the unsustainable burden of simultaneously being responsible for saving lives while training new staff around-the-clock.

"The chronic retention crisis is at the heart of this strike because it directly impacts patient care," said Bob Schoonover, President of SEIU 721. "Instead of doing the right thing, management at LA County has chosen to break labor laws – particularly California's Title 22, which establishes Nurse-to-Patient Ratios. Those ratios exist to keep patients safe and our Nurses are determined to make sure they're enforced. We've had enough of management's band-aid remedies that jeopardize patients and prolong their pain – like management's over reliance on Nurse registries and their unofficial policy of shifting high-need patients to beds where they won't receive the intensive care they need. Our Nurses are sounding the alarm to put a stop to these conditions. If they don't do it, nobody will."

Earlier this month, the Nurses of LA County rejected management's last, best and final offer. Instead, they opted instead to deliver an official, ten-day strike notice after the county refused to bargain over staffing violations and insisted on contract take-aways from a workforce already spread too thin.

"The last thing we want to do is leave our patients' bedsides but we're walking the picket line because patient safety is on the line," said Ileana Meza, a Nurse Practitioner at the LAC+USC Medical Center who also serves as the Chair of Bargaining Units which represent LA County Nurses. "We have no choice but to strike or patients will continue to suffer – and they are suffering. Management clearly has no problem with more than 11,000 patients leaving LA County ERs without receiving any treatment – in just one year alone. Management clearly has no problem with keeping more than 1,000 RN positions empty – even though the Board of Supervisors allocated plenty of money to fill every single post. Management clearly has no problem with more than two thirds of our ICU beds remaining empty – as long as they can keep moving high-need patients to lower-need beds without anyone noticing. But the Nurses of LA County have noticed. We have a problem with it. And we won't stand for it anymore. That's why we're on strike."

The current contract for SEIU 721 Registered Nurses in Bargaining Units 311 and 312 expired in September and has been temporarily extended since then. SEIU 721 has filed charges with the Employee Relations Commission, claiming that LA County broke labor laws during negotiations by engaging in regressive bargaining, among other violations. RNs in BUs 311 and 312 voted to authorize a strike because the county refuses to bargain over this issue. Their strike has been officially sanctioned by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, which represents approximately 800,000 unionized workers – and SEIU 721 also secured support from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, whose members have vowed not to cross any picket lines during the four-day strike.

BACKGROUND: Registered Nurses of LA County are going on a four-day Unfair Labor Practice strike due to persistent, unaddressed threats to patient care. Examples include the following:

- **Nurses report long waits and systemic inefficiencies due to LA County's inability to retain nurses. In 2016, more than 11,000 patients left the ERs of three LA County hospitals without receiving any care** – the LAC+USC Medical Center in Boyle Heights, the Olive View-UCLA Medical Center in Sylmar and the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Torrance, according to the Office of Statewide Planning Health and Development. Of these, nearly half – or 5,042 patients – left the LAC+USC Medical Center having received no medical treatment at all.

- **Nurses report being assigned unsafe Nurse-to-Patient Ratios, and being forced to make patients' care decisions based on staffing resources instead of patient needs.** On average, Los Angeles County is **only staffing to 57% of its licensed Intensive Care Unit (ICU) bed capacity.** The rest of their bed capacity remains "closed" regardless of patient need due to a lack of Nurses needed to fully staff all beds. The high number of "closed" bed capacity is troubling given that LA County is such a pivotal part of the region's trauma care system. ICU beds remain unstaffed – even though funding is plentiful – as **management refuses to fill Nurse vacancies, opting instead to jeopardize patient safety by moving high-need patients to beds with lower levels of care.**
- **Nurses report missing lunch breaks and being told they cannot call out sick.** LA County management has simply not filled over **1,000 Registered Nurse job openings** – even though the Board of Supervisors already budgeted taxpayer funds for all of these positions.
- **Ambulances from hospitals run by LA County's Department of Health Service as are routinely diverted 15% of the time** – a much higher rate than the statewide average of just over five percent.
- **Meanwhile, the vast majority of new Registered Nurses leave chronically understaffed LA County hospitals within the first five years of employment. From Fiscal Year 2015-2016 to Fiscal Year 2017-2018, 771 Nurses left LA County employment.** The revolving door of Nurses continues spinning indefinitely, leaving LA County's busiest ERs and trauma centers permanently staffed with the least seasoned Nurses as the few experienced RNs who do remain are continually training new staff while fulfilling their daily tasks.

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