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## **STRIKE AVERTED AS L.A. COUNTY NURSES DECLARE VICTORY – PATHWAY TO SOLVING NURSE RETENTION CRISIS ACHIEVED**

*RNs Ready to Strike for Patient Safety Get Results with Additional Funding Secured to Begin Putting an End to CA Labor Law Title 22 Patient-to-Nurse Ratio Violations*

LOS ANGELES, CA—A massive Unfair Labor Practice strike potentially affecting all L.A. County public hospitals has been averted now that Registered Nurses of SEIU Local 721 reached a Tentative Agreement with L.A. County management.

“I am so proud of our Registered Nurses,” said Bob Schoonover, President of SEIU Local 721, which represents the RNs. “Because of their determination and their compassion for their patients, we are on a real pathway to finally solving our nurse retention crisis and ending California labor law Title 22 violations. That means better patient care for tens of thousands of people. It’s all thanks to the solidarity and relentlessness of our Registered Nurses.”

As a result of intensive bargaining which escalated over the Thanksgiving weekend and culminated in tonight’s Tentative Agreement, SEIU Local 721 has secured additional funding to help retain more Registered Nurses and put a stop to the chronic retention crisis which threatens patient safety.

Between Fiscal Year 2016 and Fiscal Year 2018 alone, 1,671 RNs vacated their county positions, taking critical years of training and experience at the expense of public tax dollars with them. The impact of the revolving door has been evident in key departments – including L.A. 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.

“I cannot begin to say how proud I am of all the hard work Registered Nurses put into making this victory a reality,” said LAC+USC Nurse Practitioner Ileana Meza following the marathon negotiations. “This was not an easy fight by any means, it took bargaining around the clock, countless of calls and emails to the Board of Supervisors, actions at our worksites and above all our unrelenting commitment our patients and their care. From the beginning we made it clear that we would do whatever it takes, and all our efforts are worth it because our patients are worth it.”

“The key was that we stood united and that’s what really got L.A. County back to the table with an agreement that prioritizes patient safety and nurse retention,” said Jenny Veliz-Urzuva, a Nurse Practitioner who has worked at Harbor-UCLA for 12 years. “Many people doubted us, but we came together and did what everyone said couldn’t be done. We showed the County we were serious about striking for our patient’s safety and forced them to do the right thing in order to retain the high-quality nurses L.A. County residents deserve.”

**BACKGROUND:** Registered Nurses of L.A. County were willing and prepared to go 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 L.A. County's inability to retain nurses. In 2016, more than 11,000 patients left the ERs of three L.A. 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. Nearly one third – or 3,627 patients – left the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and nearly one quarter – or 2,584 patients – left the Olive View-UCLA Medical Center without receiving medical treatment.
- **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 L.A. 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. L.A. 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 L.A. County's Department of Health Services 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 L.A. County hospitals within the first five years of employment. From Fiscal Year 2015-2016 to Fiscal Year 2017-2018, 771 Nurses left L.A. County employment.** The revolving door of Nurses continues spinning indefinitely, leaving L.A. 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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