



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Nurses and Healthcare Workers Picket Cook County Health Over Dangerous Working Conditions**

Nurses and Healthcare Workers held an informational picket advocating for appropriate infection control and safe staffing of all workers in Cook County Health.

On November 24th, the Cook County board unanimously approved spending cuts and staff relocations for the public healthcare system in the 2021 budget. As a result, healthcare workers are protesting the unsafe conditions and staffing shortages that threaten the lives of patients and hospital staff alike. In a matter of days, the impact of these cuts were seen throughout the hospital system. Nurses are asked to work double shifts in various locations to cover for nurses who were relocated or laid off. Patients are now being transferred between overcrowded hospitals with no notification to their next of kin.

As COVID-19 surges throughout Cook County, workers demand appropriate steps to ensure the health and safety of workers, their families, and their patients.

Workers cited dangerous staffing shortages just days after the budget cuts went into effect. Members of National Nurses United reported sending hundreds of comments and calls to the Cook County Board decrying the consequences of such cuts in the midst of the spiking pandemic caseload.

"We had a whole hospital running with only two nurses inside. That's a violation of the law and creates chaos in the case of an emergency. Nurses are being forced into impossible situations and we're left responsible for the lives of our patients.", said Joyce Ball, registered nurse at Provident Hospital. "We are human too. We don't want someone to die on our watch because we're understaffed. The stress alone is enough to make you sick. We have no choice but to take our complaints to the streets. Maybe President Preckwinkle will hear us there."

Healthcare workers have been on the frontlines throughout the pandemic. Infection control procedures are still absent in many public hospital settings, creating unsafe conditions for patients and their care providers. "We've been working through this pandemic for 7 months and still have to fight for the personal protective equipment we need for protection. If we don't test patients for Covid-19, they can easily infect other patients. The same is true for nurses," said Martese Chism, National Nurses Organizing Committee Board Member. "The hospital should not be a place people fear and avoid during this pandemic."

"I've been a Cook County employee for 27 years and I have never been treated with as much disrespect as I have been treated during this pandemic," Tyrone Hawthorne, Ward Clerk on 6 East Unit. "You are bringing strikebreakers here from other states that are endangering lives. They are supposed to quarantine for 14 days after coming to our city. In our Sterile Processing Department, one of the

strikebreakers got sick and they had to send everyone home. That's endangering our patients, our lives and the lives of our families."

"From the start of the pandemic Cook County Health employees stepped up and put their lives on the line," said Dian Palmer, President of SEIU Local 73. "They've brought in strikebreakers from high-risk COVID states. Toni Preckwinkle has refused to give pandemic pay to all essential workers. Preckwinkle said she was for the people when she was getting elected and when we ask for her help she's silent. Enough is enough!"

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*National Nurses United is the largest union of Registered Nurses in the United States. In Illinois, NNU represents more than 6,000 RNs in federal sector, public sector, and private sector hospitals, clinics, health departments, and correctional facilities.*

*SEIU Local 73 represents more than 29,000 workers, primarily in public service and publicly funded positions in school districts, municipalities, social service agencies, and many other job classifications in Illinois and Indiana. We are dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and communities.*