



SEIU 73

Illinois ■ Indiana

TO: Cook County Health Human Resources Committee
RE: Update on labor negotiations

Dian Palmer
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Statement from Dian Palmer, President Local 73

Chairwoman Driscoll and distinguished members of the Cook County Health Human Resources Committee. SEIU Local 73 represents the largest number of workers within the Cook County Health System. Our members are frontline essential workers who have put their health and safety on the line throughout the pandemic to ensure Cook County residents receive quality care.

Our union and our members are committed to the Cook County Health and Hospital System. We believe that a well-funded, quality, public health system is essential for our community. Particularly the marginalized communities CCH serves and those left behind by the private healthcare system. It is in the best interest of both our organizations to work together as strategic partners advocating for a more robust health system.

Unfortunately, our relationship with Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle and the Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) have become obstacles to that strategic partnership. The County has largely ignored the concerns and difficult situation our members faced as they worked throughout the pandemic. As a result, our members voted by a 90% majority to strike for one day to draw attention to the issues of short staffing, lack of PPE, and the need for pandemic pay for at-risk workers. It was particularly hurtful to our members when CCH agreed to pay \$5 per hour to our registered nurse colleagues in pandemic pay but ignored the housekeepers, nursing assistants, and other workers, working side-by-side with nurses, taking the same risks. Especially considering that most of our members are Black and Brown and paid lower wages, this raises serious questions about disparate treatment.

In response to our members' 12-hour strike at CCH, President Preckwinkle chose to spend over a million dollars on strikebreakers from high-risk COVID states, rather than address the immediate concerns of our members. After the strike, Preckwinkle and BHR pursued criminal contempt charges against our union in State court. Additionally, BHR has conducted a witch hunt threatening these workers with disciplinary action for their participation in the 12-hour strike. Lastly, the County has continued to refuse to negotiate at a single table for CCH workers, dividing us into four separate bargaining tables, and unnecessarily dragging out the process for months without resolution.

Based on these actions, it is hard not to interpret President Preckwinkle's actions as union-busting and anti-worker. She continues to treat our members and union as enemies in the name of the Cook County Health and Hospital System.

We urge the CCH Board to not stay silent on this matter and join us in working towards a solution. Every day our members are working to save and protect the lives of their patients. All we are asking is for Cook County Health to protect our workers' lives. I am confident that by working together we can find the solutions and make Cook County Health strong enough to see us through this pandemic and beyond.

Thank you.

Dian Palmer
President