



For Immediate Release

Contact: Adrian Rojas, arojas@seiu73.org

Cook County Workers Demand Fair Pay, Respect, and an End to Expensive Outsourcing

CHICAGO, IL – After discovering that the Cook County government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on out-of-state workers, union members, represented by the Service Employees International Union Local 73, and allies gathered in front of Stroger Hospital today to demand pay that reflects their hard work and an end to costly private agency work.

Since 2018, the County has spent over \$500 million to outsource hospital work, most of which has gone to controversial out-of-state agencies like Vaya Workforce Solutions (Texas) and Cross Country Healthcare (Florida). Some of these agencies have been plagued by wage and sexual harassment lawsuits, and yet the County continues to write checks for them.

"The County does not need to hand over control of public goods to companies with a history of mismanagement and abuse. An agency-heavy workforce lowers the quality of care for Cook County patients and takes away stable, union jobs," said SEIU Local 73 president Dian Palmer.

Workers stated that they have been with the County for years to proudly serve communities in desperate need of health solutions, only to be met with disregard by management when the union has expressed its concerns. Cook County Health workers are also frustrated with the quality of care that out-of-state agencies have provided, often leaving full-time union staff to fix mistakes, taking time away from normal duties.

"Our purpose has been, and continues to be, to give underserved communities the care they need. But that has become harder due to the County's actions," said Veronica Williams, a Certified Surgical Tech. "Full-timers like me are having to work twice as hard, picking up [agency workers'] slack and guiding them through basic care principles, while still having to do our own job. This creates a ripple effect where the care at CCH

has dropped dramatically. Is this how low the County government feels about its patients?"

Other members, some dressed in costume to symbolize the states these agencies come from, noted the hypocrisy in the County offering hundreds of millions to private companies for inexperienced work while ignoring demands for retention pay to help permanently solve the short-staffing issue.

"We are asking for a retention bonus that reflects the amount of work we put in every day. Our departments are short-staffed, we are working hard juggling different tasks at the same time. The County is dragging their feet when it comes to resolving the issue. Why does the County write a blank check to private, out-of-state staffing agencies, but isn't doing what it takes to recruit and retain Cook County workers?," said Juanita Ervin, a Health Advocate at CCH.

Local political leaders voiced their support to SEIU Local 73's fight, noting the importance of quality community care and unions.

"What see now is, about \$500 million just since 2018, going to outsourcing [...] and companies that are taxed in states with ultra right-wing ideologies. Meanwhile, we have workers struggling in Cook County providing vital services for our communities," said Alderman Byron Sigcho-Lopez, 25th Ward.

Anthony Quezada, Cook County Commissioner from the 8th District, echoed the members' sentiments: "As a newly elected Commissioner, I am committed to making sure we are amplifying the voices and experiences of [...] workers and patients alike who are demanding fair pay and fair investment [for communities] and not for agencies."

SEIU Local 73 will soon be meeting with Cook County Commissioners to discuss ways the FY24 County budget can include solutions to the staffing crisis.

A livestream of the press event can be found [here](#), and photos can be located [here](#).

#

SEIU Local 73 represents more than 31,000 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.