

Media Advisory

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Nurses Welcome D.C. Council Members' Support *New Unfair Labor Practice Charges Filed Against Washington Hospital Center*

National Nurses United, the nation's largest union and professional association of registered nurses, today praised the ten members of the District of Columbia City Council who urged Washington Hospital Center to settle its ongoing labor dispute.

In a letter to hospital president John Sullivan sent today, the Council members wrote, "We are deeply concerned that the dispute between the Washington Hospital Center and National Nurses United continues without resolution." The letter cites the nurses' concern about safe staffing, the lack of respect shown by managerial staff to the nurses, and the hospital administration's attempt to rescind hard-won economic gains from the nurses. "These issues of course have an impact on the hospital's ability to attract and retain qualified and experienced nurses," the Council members wrote. "It was disturbing to hear that the turnover rate of nurses at the hospital has exceeded 13% annually for the past six years."

The Council members stated they "appreciate the hard work and dedication of the staff of the Washington Hospital Center" and expressed their hope that hospital management would "be able to successfully resolve these concerns to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned."

The letter was spearheaded by Council Member Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr., in whose ward the hospital resides. Other Council members who signed the letter were Michael A. Brown, Sekou Biddle, Marion Barry, Yvette Alexander, Tommy Wells, Phil Mendelson, Jim Graham, Muriel Bowser and Kwame R. Brown.

"We are very pleased that these Council members expressed their concern to hospital management," said Joe Cassidy, RN, a nurse who works in the emergency room at the Washington Hospital Center. "Management's continued attack on nursing standards and its failure to address our patient safety concerns are getting noticed throughout our community and we are grateful that the political leadership of this city is willing to hold MedStar Health accountable."

"I applaud Council Member Thomas for taking the initiative on this important issue affecting the health care of so many District residents," said Cassidy.

The Council members' letter followed on the heels of another charge filed by NNU with the National Labor Relations Board alleging that the company committed five new violations of federal labor laws. The charge states that the Washington Hospital Center on multiple occasions blocked union access to its members in the hospital, surveilled, threatened and otherwise interfered with the union and its members, engaged in bad-faith bargaining with the union, discriminated against a union member to discourage her active participation and membership in the union, and improperly ceased dues check-off for the nurses. Charges previously filed by the union against the hospital are still pending before the NLRB.

NNU announced on February 22 plans for a one-day strike on Friday, March 4 to protest WHC's ongoing unfair labor practices and to demand a fair agreement for the dedicated nursing staff. .

The union and management engaged in negotiation sessions last Thursday and Friday, as well as Monday and Tuesday of this week, but failed to reach an agreement. Talks are scheduled to continue tomorrow.

Some 1,650 Washington Hospital Center RNs are represented by National Nurses United, the nation's largest union and professional association of nurses.

In addition to patient care concerns, WHC RNs also object to attempts to cut nurses' pay and benefits, and charge that the company violated federal labor law in implementing cuts in workplace and economic standards.

The hospital is owned by the MedStar Health chain whose policies the nurses say have eroded patient care conditions and has prompted an exodus of hundreds of experienced RNs from Washington Hospital Center further undercutting care standards.

WHC RNs have been without a contract since last June. NNU has represented the nurses since last October.

NNU was founded in 2009 by the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee, United American Nurses, and Massachusetts Nurses Association

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