

**UNITE
HERE!**

 **ALLIANCE
OF HEALTH CARE UNIONS**



 **AFSCME**

AFL-CIO
AMERICA'S UNIONS

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
UNITY AND STRENGTH FOR WORKERS

UFCW




A Union of Professionals



November 5, 2021

To Members of Congress:

Yesterday, unions representing 32,000 healthcare workers at Kaiser Permanente delivered notice that they will strike on November 15 unless negotiations improve. An additional 8,000 members have authorized a strike. These negotiations affect 52,000 nurses, professional, service, and technical workers represented by AFSCME, AFT, ILWU, IUOE, IBT, UFCW, UNITE HERE, and USW at hospitals and clinics in Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, D.C., Colorado, California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii.

These are the workers who risked their lives in a desperate struggle to save patients in a global pandemic, lacking basic protective equipment, sleeping in their cars and hotels to protect their families, and suffering extreme physical and mental health challenges with which they are still coping. While the pandemic is no longer a crisis for many, these healthcare heroes are now struggling harder than ever, fighting not just COVID and PTSD, but a new tsunami of resignations and retirements that have left them so short-staffed that some days their units feel as besieged by patient needs as they were in the darkest days of the surges.

Since February 2020, more than half a million healthcare workers have left healthcare, and hospitals struggle to fill needed jobs. This is a silent crisis on top of a pandemic.

But unlike the pandemic, the staffing crisis is a human-created crisis with clear solutions. Most employers are taking the obvious step of raising wages to recruit workers in a shortage.

Consulting firm Kaufman Hall found that 88% of responding health and hospital systems have increased salaries, and 68% are offering hiring bonuses.

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Yet Kaiser executives chose this moment to turn their backs on a successful, nationally-recognized labor management partnership and launch a concessionary bargaining campaign. Kaiser Permanente would rank #34 on the Fortune 500, ahead of Disney, Nike, and Lockheed Martin. It is so profitable they turned back \$500 million in federal CARES Act money last year. In 2020, Kaiser made \$2.2 billion in operating profit (not including investment income). Kaiser sits on \$44.5 billion in cash reserves. Insured membership of 12.5 million continues to grow, adding 129,000 in the first quarter of 2021.

Despite Kaiser Permanente's financial strength and continued growth, they are demanding healthcare workers accept an insulting 2% wage increase *and* a two-tier wage structure which would lower wages for incoming workers. Furthermore, Kaiser refuses to settle fair contracts for workers who organized more than two years ago, or take steps to rectify unequal wage scales that have a clear racially discriminatory impact. They have also rejected proposals to work with employees to safeguard patient care by improving staffing.

We will be reaching out to you to ask your support for a fair resolution of these negotiations.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
AFSCME
AFT
Alliance of Health Care Unions
IBT
ILWU
IUOE
UFCW
UNAC/UHCP
UNITE HERE
USW