

# Georgia Kaiser Permanente workers vote to authorize strike

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8 November 2021

Nearly 2,500 health care workers at Kaiser Permanente's facilities in Georgia voted by 96 percent to authorize a strike earlier this month. The vote came just days before unions covering nearly 32,000 Kaiser Permanente workers on the West Coast announced a strike deadline of November 15.

The Georgia health care workers, including nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, physical and occupational therapists, and midwives, like their counterparts on the West Coast, are fighting attempts by Kaiser to impose a two-tiered wage system, paying new employees at a substantially reduced rate and with fewer benefits.

They are also fighting for higher wages and increased staffing. Like others in the health care industry, they have faced intolerable conditions during the pandemic, which has killed close to 180,000 health care workers worldwide. According to a union survey of registered nurses at Kaiser released in September, 42 percent were considering leaving the profession due to the conditions they have faced during the pandemic.

On Facebook, many workers spoke out in solidarity. "Get your money from these corporations, they hoard profits instead of paying the people who's making them money! It's time for a worker movement that require better pay and benefits from all these large businesses," said one worker.

Another worker said, "Good for them. I believe KP had very healthy profits..." In the first half of this year, Kaiser's net revenue increased by 47 percent to \$5 billion.

"Here we go with the BS Tier system," said one other worker. "They do this all the time for various occupations. If you never miss what you never HAD, but others before you have better benefits, you don't know what you missed."

The workers are part of a growing strike wave in the United States, and around the world, including among workers in education, logistics, transport, steel, mining agriculture, and garment manufacturing.

The demands by the health care workers are completely justified, but for their struggle to succeed they must break out of the straitjacket which the unions are seeking to impose on their struggle. The UFCW, like trade unions as a whole, has no interest in carrying out a genuine struggle and will keep the strike at Kaiser's Georgia facilities isolated from the struggles of other health care workers, as well also the union's own 1.3 million members in food processing, health care, manufacturing, and grocery and retail stores.

While health care workers everywhere are fighting for the principle that public health must take absolute priority over private profits, the UFCW has been fighting for the exact opposite over the course of the pandemic in the meatpacking and food processing industry. Over 59,000 workers at the five largest US meatpacking companies have become infected and 269 have died, according to a recent congressional report.

The UFCW has played the key role in helping management to conceal the extent of the spread in the plants and to keep workers on the job. In one particularly grotesque incident, the union responded to thousands of workers falling sick at Tyson's pork plant in Waterloo, Iowa in the opening months of the pandemic by working with management to implement a perfect attendance bonus. At the same time, plant managers were privately running a betting pool on how many workers would eventually become infected.

For their strike to be successful, Kaiser workers in Georgia must unite with Kaiser workers on the west coast and other health care workers, including striking nurses on strike at Mercy Hospital in Buffalo, New

York and St. Vincent Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, and develop their own initiative independent of the union by forming independent rank-and-file committees to organize and coordinate their struggle.



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