

Why is the MNA-UMPNC saying Michigan Medicine nurses will receive no strike pay?

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Are you a nurse or health care worker at Michigan Medicine? Contact the WSWs Health Care Workers Newsletter using the form at the end of this article. What are the main issues you face at your workplace? What do you think needs to be done? All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Nurses at Michigan Medicine are attending meetings across the Ann Arbor-based health care system this week to vote on what the Michigan Nurses Association (MNA) and its local affiliate, the University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC), is calling a “work stoppage in protest of the university’s unfair labor practices.”

There is widespread support for a walkout among the 6,200 Michigan Medicine nurses, who have been working without a contract since July 1. Nurses are locked in a struggle against intolerable working conditions at the fifth largest hospital in the state, which is run by the University of Michigan.

The top issue is unsafe and unsustainable workloads stemming from the refusal of the hospital to hire more nurses. Throughout the contract negotiations, hospital management has made it clear the new contract will not address the staffing shortage. Michigan Medicine has maintained it will not discuss staffing ratios as a mandatory bargaining issue because the subject is supposedly unrelated to “employee safety.”

As we have explained over the past four months, the MNA-UMPNC leadership is a primary obstacle to nurses at Michigan Medicine going on the offensive to fight for their rights. Since negotiations began in March, the union has told nurses that strike action by public employees is illegal, except in response to unfair labor practices.

Instead of preparing for a strike, the union organized protest events that appealed to the university’s Board

of Regents to come to the aid of nurses. Nearly two months after the contract expired, and when it was obvious to everyone that the regents were firmly behind the attack of Michigan Medicine on the nurses, the MNA-UMPNC filed an unfair labor practice charge and called for a “work stoppage” vote.

Now, the MNA-UMPNC is putting up obstacles to actually implementing a vote by the rank and file to take strike action. For example, the union has said that after a “yes” vote by the nurses, it will give the hospital a 10-day notice before any walkout “so it can prepare.” This is under conditions, as we reported last week, where hospital management is recruiting “replacement nurses” to use as strikebreakers in the event of a walkout.

Moreover, in the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of the union website the MNA-UMPNC is telling nurses they will receive no strike pay if they go on strike to fight for their rights.

The following exchange appears:

Q: Would I be paid when participating in the work stoppage?

To which the union replies:

No. This protest is a sacrifice we need to make to demonstrate to the university that we will not tolerate unfair labor practices.

Nurses pay hundreds of dollars in union dues every year. It’s their money.

What gives the union tops the right to decide that this money cannot be used to strengthen the fight of the rank and file for safe and tolerable working conditions for themselves and adequate staffing to ensure the safety of their patients?

Just ask yourself: Who benefits from bankrupting nurses compelled to strike against money-mad, ruthless employers? To ask the question is to answer it!

Are the bureaucrats who run the MNA and the Michigan AFL-CIO willing to forgo their ample salaries and “sacrifice” along with the nurses?

The Michigan Nurses Association has significant financial resources. According to filings submitted to the US Labor Department at the end of last year, the MNA has total assets of \$23,170,482, including \$8,374,552 in cash and \$13,746,551 in investments. The filing says that in 2021 the MNA took in \$7,372,106 in dues from 13,000 member nurses across the state.

Instead of using these resources to support struggles like the Michigan Medicine nurses’ contract battle, the union squanders it on six-figure salaries for its executives and staff members and to make campaign contributions to Democratic Party candidates who do nothing for hospital workers and then turn around and enforce anti-strike laws.

The top six officers of the MNA take in a combined annual income of nearly \$800,000. This includes Executive Director Janella James, who received a total of \$188,105 in 2021.

The union spends more than \$2 million annually on employee compensation for a staff of more than 50 individuals.

One thing is for sure: These individuals are not fighting on the picket lines to help win nurses’ battles for decent pay and working conditions. The grand total of cash disbursements for strike benefits last year was ... \$0.00.

Nevertheless, the MNA filing shows expenditures of \$3,412,114 in 2021 for something called “representational activities.”

These figures demonstrate that the MNA, like the rest of the official labor movement, is a union in name only. It would be more accurate to describe it as a labor contracting business.

Michigan Medicine nurses should demand that the MNA-UMPNC provide strike benefits from the

substantial financial resources of the union to make sure that the hospital is not able to starve them out on the picket line.

With more than \$8 million in cash, the MNA has enough ready money to pay every nurse at Michigan Medicine more than \$500 per week in strike benefits for more than two weeks. And that does not account for its millions more in investments.

In any event, it is the rank-and-file nurses who should be making the decisions about how most effectively to use their money.

To take forward the fight for strike pay and to advance demands that are in the interests of the nurses, a rank-and-file committee of nurses and other Michigan Medicine workers should be formed to take the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy.

The *WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter* suggests that nurses adopt the following demands:

- **Safe nurse-to-patient ratios. Hire more nurses and support staff. The hospital must improve conditions so nurses can ensure their own health and safety and that of their patients.**

- **A halt to mandatory overtime and extended on-call hours. Nurses deserve a quality of life that is free from 16-hour shifts and being on call all hours of the day and night.**

- **A pay increase of 15 percent per year, plus cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) on a monthly basis so that wages keep up with rising inflation.**

- **Upgrade protections against COVID-19 and monkeypox. New and more dangerous COVID-19 variants are rising. Nurses need sufficient PPE, facility upgrades and proper procedures to ensure their health and safety on the job and to protect the health of their patients.**

- **Vote to strike! Set a strike date of September 6!**

- **Livestream all contract talks and open negotiations to democratically elected representatives of the rank and file!**

- **Answer strikebreaking with a general strike of all Michigan labor!**



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