

Strike vote by Rochester, New York nurses

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Approximately 900 nurses have voted to strike at Rochester General Hospital (RGH) over wages, and what they say are inadequate staffing levels and unsafe working conditions.

Underlining the immense support for a strike among the nurses, over 90 percent voted in favor according to a press release from the Rochester Union of Nurses and Allied Professionals (RUNAP), which is affiliated with the Northeast Nurses Association.

The union was formed in July of last year due to low wages and a mass exodus of nurses caused by the pandemic resulting in nurses at times caring for 30 patients at a time in a 12-hour shift.

Studies have shown that for each additional patient in an RN's workload above the preferred nurse-to-patient ratio of 1:4, a regular occurrence at RGH, the likelihood of patient death increases by 7 percent.

Adding to the burden of RGH nurses is the fact that the hospital borders some of the poorest neighborhoods in Rochester and treats a large number of patients from these areas. Moreover, Rochester itself ranks among the poorest cities in the country, with nearly half of all children living in poverty according to the US Census Bureau. Only nearby Syracuse, New York has a higher childhood poverty rate than Rochester among mid-to-large-size cities.

Rochester Regional Health, the health network that runs RGH, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) and pays no taxes. Yet it was able to spend \$1.3 million to dissuade nurses from organizing throughout the summer of 2022.

Hospital staffing documents at the time showed that close to three-quarters of staff positions were unfulfilled, with the hospital relying heavily on traveling nurses who typically are paid triple or higher the hourly pay of staff nurses.

During the same time period, the health network grew its net assets from \$568 million at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 to \$987 million in its most recently

reported quarter.

Last Friday following the strike announcement, Rochester Regional Health issued a statement its officials, who make millions a year, saying it was "very disappointed" with the results of the vote.

Highlighting the abysmally low wages RGH has historically offered nurses, one RN reported receiving just a \$0.35 raise amid the pandemic and a grand total of less than a \$2.00 raise between 2012 and 2020, just recently breaking \$30 an hour.

Despite the growing militancy of RGH nurses and workers across the country, RUNAP has already limited the strike to running for just two days, from 7 a.m. on Thursday, August 3 to 7 a.m. on Saturday, August 5.

A similar strategy was employed by the National Nurses United (NNU) when 900 nurses recently went on strike against Ascension Seton Medical Center in Austin, Texas over the same issues RGH nurses are striking for.

Despite marking the largest nurses strike in Texas history, it was likewise limited by the union to an ineffective one-day strike aimed primarily at letting nurses vent their anger.

Nurses at Rochester Regional Health should oppose the isolation and limits placed on their struggle by the union amid the biggest movement by the working class in decades, which has already seen strikes by writers and actors in the entertainment industry and is now set to spread to UPS and Yellow Freight. The unity of workers across industries requires the building of rank-and-file committees independent of the unions to organize their fight. These committees, democratically-elected and controlled by workers, will advance demands determined by what workers need and not by the profit requirements of management.

Nurses who are interested in getting involved should contact the World Socialist Web Site for more

information.



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