

Hundreds of nursing home workers go on strike in Western New York

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Hundreds of nursing home workers began a 7-day strike Tuesday morning at five for-profit, long-term nursing home facilities near Buffalo, New York.

The workers, who are members of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, are demanding better wages and benefits and improved working conditions at their respective facilities.

Within the healthcare industry, nursing home workers are some of the lowest paid and work in some of the most challenging and physically difficult and demanding conditions. Apart from simply providing medical care, their work can include dressing, shopping, preparing meals, bathing and physically moving residents who often have limited mobility.

Moreover, COVID-19 has disproportionately hit nursing homes, killing over 200,000 nursing home workers and residents within the United States, according to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). This disproportionate rate of death within nursing homes is profoundly worsened by understaffing, substandard infection control and overall poor working and medical conditions common throughout long-term nursing home facilities.

Thanks to their tireless effort, the nursing home workers' strike has strong support.

As a 95-year-old resident and the daughter of another resident at one of the striking facilities told *WIVB* news in Buffalo:

They need everything they're asking for. ... I'm a patient here, and I enjoy being here. It's very satisfying to have these young people taking care of us.

Healthcare workers across the country are preparing strike action. In Detroit, Michigan, on Tuesday workers at five Ciena Healthcare-owned nursing home facilities held a one-day strike seeking better pay and benefits while working in highly stressful working conditions.

The workers, who are likewise in the SEIU (Service Employees International Union), have been working without a contract for months, some since the beginning of 2024.

Like nursing home workers in Western New York, Ciena nursing home workers cited low pay and poor working conditions within their facilities.

Competency Evaluated Nurse Assistant (CENA) Tikesba Williams said in a statement:

We dedicate our time to caring for our residents, but Ciena makes us jump through hoops to care for ourselves. We don't have adequate supplies and we are constantly short staffed, which takes a huge toll on us. Being able to provide for my family—for my granddaughter—matters so much. We deserve to be treated with respect no matter what our job title is.

Next week, thousands of nursing home workers at 51 facilities across Connecticut are due to strike to demand better wages. This would be the largest healthcare strike in Connecticut state history and would impact more than a quarter of the state's nursing homes.

In Providence, Rhode Island, 800 workers are on strike at Butler Hospital to demand better wages and safety. And this Thursday, nurses at Long Beach Medical Center in Southern California are set to launch

a strike.

This shows the potential for a unified struggle linking up with healthcare workers across the region and the US. But 1199 SEIU union officials are deliberately isolating the strike. They announced agreements Monday night at two other facilities that were set to strike as well, while four other facilities had their strike notices withdrawn.

As a result, instead of the 11 facilities that were set to strike Tuesday morning, just five remain, sidelining hundreds of other workers who could have advanced the struggle at the remaining facilities.

The original strike notice issued earlier this month included a total of 15 facilities, after 2,500 caregivers overwhelmingly voted to authorize the strike.

In addition, the SEIU has already announced that any potential strike will last just one week, effectively undermining the position of the remaining nursing home workers on strike by giving owners advance notice the strike will not last long.

Significantly, the Connecticut strike was originally timed to coincide with the New York strike, but the union bureaucracy delayed it by one week at the behest of Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont. The strike will now begin the day after the New York strike ends, in a flagrant effort to divide workers who are both members of 1199.

This is not the first time that the union has sold out Connecticut nursing home workers. In 2021, 1199SEIU called off a statewide strike following an agreement with Lamont which laid the ground for the last contract. In that strike, COVID-19 safety would have been a key issue. Lamont, a multimillionaire and former investment banker worth over \$200 million, was prepared to deploy the National Guard to try and break the strike.

The McGuire Group, a for-profit company which owns several of the remaining nursing homes on strike, issued a statement signaling that it was ready to wait out the strike by using non-union scabs.

The statement read:

Our team is well-prepared and cross-trained. We will be using our dedicated non-union nursing staff, as well as support staff from our other facilities across Western New York and

the state.

The strike by nursing home workers in Western New York is part of a growing movement of healthcare workers throughout the United States and, in fact, the world who are demanding better wages, staffing and working conditions.

But a real struggle cannot be entrusted to the SEIU bureaucrats, and the struggle must be taken out of their hands. Nursing home and healthcare workers must join autoworkers, educators and others in forming rank-and-file committees democratically elected of the most militant and trusted members to lead these struggles.

These committees will have to break the isolation of the workers by uniting all nursing home workers in an all-out battle against the domination of healthcare and every other facet of social life to the profit motive.



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