

McLaren Macomb, Michigan healthcare workers strike over unsafe staffing and deplorable working conditions

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On the morning of July 7, 2025, 700 healthcare workers at McLaren Macomb Hospital, northeast of Detroit, Michigan, walked off the job and onto the picket line. The strikers include 500 nurses, technologists and other healthcare professionals and 200 clerical workers.

The nurses are members of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 40. According to the nurses, this strike is not just about wages—It is to demand safety, dignity and high quality patient care. The strike was coordinated and announced 10 days in advance, giving the hospital plenty of notice. This after several years when workers initiated countless grievances over unsafe staffing levels, violations of workers’ rights and unfair labor practices (ULPs).

According to the union, McLaren Macomb management has continuously engaged in “bargaining in bad faith.” As negotiations faltered, the union filed formal ULP charges and publicly announced its intent to strike, after years of unresolved concerns and escalating risks to both staff and patients.

In many previous struggles unions have used the tactic of limited, one- or two-day strikes as a tactic to defuse workers’ anger while not seriously impacting the operations or profits of management.

In 2021 OPEIU Local 40 called off a threatened strike by McLaren nurses over unsafe staffing levels and accepted a contract that contained vague language regarding staffing, with no real enforcement mechanism.

Workers have continuously spoken out, not only about staffing, but also about being undervalued and ignored by an administration more focused on profits

than safety.

The union announced its planned strike for July 7-9 from 7:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. In retaliation, hospital management announced it would lock out the striking employees on July 12. This despite several nurses and specialists reporting to the *World Socialist Web Site* that management had called and pleaded with them to come in to work. One striker asked, “Why weren’t we valued like this before?”

In an effort to maintain operations, McLaren Macomb brought in temporary replacement staff—paying them, according to striking nurses, as much as \$108 per hour. These figures stand in stark contrast to the pay received by long-term staff, who are struggling to get by.

The conditions at the hospital are part of a broader public health crisis driven by decades of cost-cutting and profit-maximizing at the expense of patients and workers alike. This has resulted in chronic understaffing—a problem that has plagued McLaren Macomb for over four years.

As the *Macomb Daily* reported, the same concerns were raised during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Nurses then, as now, demanded enforceable staffing ratios that would allow them to safely care for patients. But despite national recognition as “healthcare heroes” during the pandemic, systemic change never followed.

While healthcare workers continue to struggle under inhuman conditions, McLaren’s financial reports show booming revenues and income. According to ProPublica, McLaren Health Care—classified as a nonprofit—generates hundreds of millions in annual revenue. Its top executives are generously compensated, with CEO Philip A. Incarnati reportedly holding a net worth of \$10 million. Executives at

McLaren average over \$240,000 per year in salary, according to Comparably, while many frontline healthcare workers have to work overtime just to make ends meet.

Jason, a 15-year veteran at McLaren Macomb Medical Center, told the WSWs:

“I have been watching things go downhill for a long time. It used to be they didn’t care. Now we know they’re out for blood.

“If you don’t oppose the corporate management and the establishment at this point, your eyes aren’t open. I think you can take it right out of this building and really put it on every system, every career, pretty much every building, they’re looking for dirty and they’re looking for ‘take us to the bank.’ The fact is that corporations are so dirty—They’re running us over every day anyway with the short staffing and the lack of ancillary help.

“COVID kicked us in the butt hard enough and then to come back. There’s a sign you’ll see out there. It says, ‘called heroes, treated like zeros.’ You know, we were the ‘heroes’ of 2020, but now it’s back to pizza parties every year, or a year and a half. That’s how they say, thanks.

“We’re better than that. It’s not about the college degree. It’s about what we do and our skills, our empathy with our patients. Keeping people alive is priceless, last I checked. But who are they treating wrong? Nurses, teachers, and that’s the period we’re living in. So just do what I can do, and that’s it.

“Then there’s the fact that every good person I know, no matter who they voted for, all want the same things. Every good friend of mine across the party line wants exactly what I want. Take my tax dollars and do good for people that need it.”

Other workers described blood and urine specimens being tested in labs with temperatures reaching 91 degrees Fahrenheit (32.7 degrees Celsius). Air conditioners were brought in by management, which only reduced the temperature by 5 degrees Fahrenheit. One worker described refrigeration unit alarms going off and routine testing methods being compromised by the heat.

Workers immediately solidarized themselves with the investigation into the death of Stellantis autoworker Ronald Adams Sr. initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). A nurse who worked previously as a firefighter

understood the key-in/tag-out method used at the Dundee Engine plant where Adams died. When told that there was a bucket of keys turned in after the Ronald’s death, he immediately said, “This was not his fault. It’s a cover-up!”



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