

# NYC home care workers end hunger strike on disputed promise of vote on 24-hour shifts

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A weeklong hunger strike by New York City home care workers fighting to ban 24-hour shifts ended Thursday after City Council Speaker Julie Menin’s office told organizers the “No More 24” Act would be brought to a vote by May 14—a commitment her office immediately denied making. The strike, the second in two years, followed repeated broken commitments and months of inaction after multiple protests at City Hall. It ended without a concrete gain, leaving the workers’ struggle once again suspended pending a future vote.

This action demonstrates that workers cannot rely on the City Council or any existing political channels to advance their demands. Appeals to City Council Democrats, including Menin and Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who voiced support for the bill while taking no action, have led to a dead end. The determination shown by the strikers must now find a new form. To win their demands, home care workers must organize independently and mobilize broader layers of New York City workers confronting the same conditions of overwork, low pay and inadequate healthcare.

The bill is not being judged based on workers’ conditions, but on its financial impact. Ending 24-hour shifts would require increased Medicaid spending. At every stage, officials have cited funding as the decisive issue while postponing a vote and extending “ongoing discussions.” That cost question places the decision in Albany, where Medicaid funding is controlled. Reports that the office of Kathy Hochul has pressed City Council leadership to delay a vote, along with repeated insistence that any change must be “paid for,” underscore that the demand to abolish 24-hour shifts has been subordinated to budget priorities.

Responsibility is passed between city and state authorities, each citing the same financial constraints, while no action is taken. The legislative process thus

operates as a mechanism for delaying and containing the workers’ demands.

The hunger strike was carried out in isolation, without any mobilization by 1199SEIU, which represents roughly 200,000 healthcare workers in New York City. Despite the serious health risks faced by workers on hunger strike and the well-documented physical and psychological toll of 24-hour shifts—including chronic pain, injury and sleep deprivation—the union has taken no action to organize broader opposition, call strikes or mobilize its membership.

Instead, the struggle has been confined to a small group of workers appealing to City Council officials. This isolation has allowed the political establishment to delay action without facing pressure from the wider workforce. The union leadership’s silence, even as the strike ended on a disputed promise, underscores its refusal to mobilize the power of the workers it claims to represent.

In this way, the absence of any organized intervention by the union apparatus has been decisive. By keeping the struggle limited and disconnected from broader layers of workers, it has ensured that the workers’ demands remain subject to the same political processes that have already failed to deliver results.

The containment of the struggle extends beyond the City Council and the union apparatus to organizations that present themselves as supporters of workers. The hunger strike was organized outside the union apparatus by groups such as Ain’t I a Woman?! and the Chinese Staff and Workers’ Association, yet even here, the struggle was directed toward appeals to City Council officials and ended based on a disputed promise of a future vote.

Within the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA),

rank-and-file members voted to support abolishing 24-hour shifts, only to have that position overridden by the organization's leadership, which moved to block official backing for the bill. This reflects the same alignment seen at the city level. The leadership of the DSA acted in line with the union apparatus and Democratic Party officials, refusing to support the workers' demands as the bill was delayed. Figures such as Mayor Mamdani have voiced support while remaining within a political framework that has produced no action.

The result is that even where support develops from below, it is blocked and redirected. Workers are encouraged to appeal to elected officials and established organizations, only to be brought back to the same processes of delay and inaction. In this way, the political environment functions to contain the struggle and prevent it from developing into a broader movement capable of forcing change.

The outcome of the hunger strike demonstrates that the struggle to abolish 24-hour shifts has come into direct conflict with the political organizations and financial interests that govern the healthcare system. At every level—from the City Council to the state government, from the union apparatus to organizations aligned with the Democratic Party—the workers' demands have been blocked, delayed or redirected.

This is not the result of isolated decisions, but of a system in which healthcare is subordinated to cost and profit. The insistence that any reform must be “paid for,” the pressure exerted through Medicaid funding, and the refusal to mobilize the collective strength of healthcare workers all point to the same reality: the needs of workers are subordinated to the financial interests of healthcare companies and the investors who profit from them.

Under these conditions, even determined struggles are contained when they are confined to appeals to politicians, union officials and allied organizations. The experience of the hunger strike shows that without a break from these channels, workers are repeatedly drawn back into the same processes of delay and inaction.

To win their demands, home care workers must organize independently of the union apparatus and the Democratic Party, building rank-and-file committees under workers' direct control and uniting with broader

layers of New York City workers confronting the same conditions of overwork, low pay and inadequate healthcare. Only through the independent mobilization of the working class can the power necessary to impose fundamental changes in working conditions be brought to bear.



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