

UIHC Caregivers Ratify New Contract, Continue Campaign to Protect Care & Fix Management Culture

- After intense contract campaign generating broad public support, 92.9% of Univ. of Iowa caregivers vote to approve new union contract

- UIHC administration used state's unfair labor laws to strip language and professional standards from contract, but caregivers won fairer raises

- Caregivers continuing campaign to protect patient care and fix broken management culture; new CEO refusing to meet with union

IOWA CITY — RNs and healthcare professionals at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) voted Thursday to ratify their new union contract; 92.9 percent of the caregivers voted to approve the agreement and nearly all voters signed up to participate in the union's continuing campaign to protect patient care.

The two-year agreement includes 2.1 percent raises for all caregivers in 2019 and 2020. But the UIHC administration used Iowa's unfair labor laws to eliminate the language and professional standards that had been in the previous union contract.

"This contract is better than the administration's first offer, but they refused to reach a truly fair agreement," said Gillian McVicar, a medical lab scientist in UIHC's neonatal intensive care unit and a member of the union bargaining team. "That's why we're continuing our campaign to protect patient care and fix the management culture at our hospital."

The 3,800 UIHC caregivers are members of SEIU Local 199, and their bargaining unit covers more than 70 job classifications, including registered nurses, medical lab scientists, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, social workers and many more positions.

During their contract talks, the UIHC caregivers mounted an intense public outreach campaign, which generated:

- Hundreds of thousands of visitors to the union's Facebook page, with [one post on UIHC's neglect of caregivers](#) during February's snowstorms reaching 80,000.
- [Front-page coverage](#) in the Iowa City Press-Citizen.
- Op-eds in the [Des Moines Register](#) and [Cedar Rapids Gazette](#)
- And [multiple TV news stories](#).

The caregivers began negotiations for the new contract in November, and their talks with the Iowa Board of Regents, who oversee UIHC, ended on February 19. The

Regents, empowered by Iowa's unfair labor laws, insisted on a contract of just three pages that covers only pay. The previous union contract was 56 pages. Had the union team rejected the Regents' contract offer, it would have led to an unfair arbitration process where the outcome would almost certainly have been worse.

While the caregivers made as much progress as possible in negotiations, they are looking at the new contract as a floor, not a ceiling. At Thursday's ratification vote, they launched their "2.1 and We're Not Done" campaign, which lays out a plan for further improvements at the hospital, including:

- **Implementing a Strong Retention Plan.** Caregivers are deeply worried that the further loss of experienced staff could threaten the hospital's world-class care. UIHC's own data shows that its use of agency nurses jumped from 42,301 contracted days in fiscal year 2017 to 55,959 days in fiscal year 2018. The union is seeking raises over and above 2.1 percent in the many units and job classes where even the administration has indicated that higher pay is needed for retention.
- **Fixing UIHC's Broken Management Culture.** The RNs and healthcare professionals are calling on UIHC to reverse a series of demoralizing policy changes. The current sick leave policy threatens caregivers with discipline if they take more than a small amount of sick time, but they're also being threatened with discipline if they show up to work sick. Overtime has been gutted so employees who used to get overtime pay no longer do even when working the same schedule. UIHC caregivers' total overtime pay dropped from \$7.7 million in FY 2016 to just \$1.7 million in 2018.

The caregivers had hoped new CEO Suresh Gunasekaran would work together with them to repair morale at the hospital. But Gunasekaran has refused to meet with the union since arriving in November. He sent the union an email in late January saying that any communications with him could only be forwarded through the hospital's human relations department.

While the ratification vote ended at 9:30 p.m. Thursday night, the union caregivers' campaign for fairness at UIHC will continue indefinitely.

SEIU Local 199 represents 5,000 healthcare and public service workers across Iowa. It is an affiliate of the 2-million-member Service Employees International Union. SEIU's Healthcare Division includes 1 million nurses, lab techs, environmental service workers and other vital staff who serve 60 million patients and clients.