TO: Cook County Health Board of Directors

RE: CCH Labor Negotiations

**Statement from Lizzy Bortoto, Organizer for SEIU Local 73**

Chairman Hammock and members of the Cook County Health Board of Directors, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Lizzy Bortoto, and I’m an organizer with SEIU Local 73 assigned to Stroger Hospital, the CORE Center, and the Professional Building.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise to this Board that the impact of COVID-19 on our members, and other workers across the Health System, has been nothing short of traumatic. The levels of exhaustion, frustration, and anger our members have experienced as frontline, essential workers throughout this pandemic are real. On top of President Preckwinkle’s hypocritical pursuit of criminal and civil contempt charges and hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages against SEIU Local 73 for a 12-hour strike, BHR continues to show our bargaining committee that there’s no urgency to address the issues we raise.

Instead of working with our union towards solutions, CCH is continuing to retaliate against our members by pulling them into anxiety-inducing investigatory hearings. Since the end of January, CCH has conducted over 50 investigatory hearings about the strike at Stroger alone, with more hearings scheduled every day. It’s already traumatic to work through a respiratory-based pandemic as a Respiratory Therapist in a department that’s at 50% staffing levels. It’s already chaotic to work as a Health Advocate on a COVID-19 unit when you’re assigned to 26 patients by yourself. It’s already scary to work as a Sterile Processing Tech when over half of the department has tested positive for COVID-19. It’s already offensive to work as a Medical Assistant in the COVID-19 testing tent when the RN’s you’re working alongside are receiving $5/hour in hazard pay and you’re not. Our members have already experienced enough stress on the frontlines of this horrific pandemic, and should not be shamed for advocating on behalf of patients and treated like criminals.

Toni Preckwinkle cannot call our members Healthcare Heroes in public or our Union ‘a labor partner’ and then direct CCH management and BHR on a witch hunt and a union-busting criminal and civil contempt case in the same breath. These intimidation tactics do not sit well with our members and are moving us farther from the relationship we need to make CCH an Employer and Provider of Choice.
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Statement from Thiesha Tiggs, Trauma Department

Chairman Hammock and members of the Cook County Health Board of Directors, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Thiesha Tiggs. I work as a Health Advocate in the Trauma Department at Stroger and I have been employed by Cook County Health since 2003.

In December, many of my workers went on strike to shine a light on what is happening in our hospitals. They spoke out about short staffing, lack of PPE, and the need to provide pandemic pay to the hospital staff providing frontline essential care in COVID units. For our work as frontline healthcare workers, we were called heroes.

Clearly, our nursing colleagues’ lives are valuable enough to warrant an extra $5 an hour. But the hospital staff who work side-by-side with nurses in COVID units throughout the pandemic, often risking more exposure because they have to serve multiple patients a day, are cast aside.

Now, the County has seen fit to treat my co-workers in respiratory therapy, sterile processing, and med surg not as heroes but as if they are the enemy of Cook County Health. The reality is my co-workers have been and continue to advocate for their patients.

How can they provide the highest level of care when CCH burdens them with undue stress brought on by these baseless, retaliatory investigatory hearings? And it is important to understand that these threats of discipline are being done in your name – the CCH Board’s name, CEO Rocha’s name, Cook County Health’s name.

I thought we were here to work together to ensure the people of Cook County had a health system that was second to none. The reality seems far from it. There is a direct relationship between the working conditions of frontline healthcare workers and quality patient care. If CCH is going to be a Provider of Choice in our community, then a precondition is that we must also be an Employer of Choice.

I call on you to make it clear to Toni Preckwinkle, this is your health system. End the attacks on my co-workers and come to the bargaining table to work with us as partners, not your enemy, towards a fair contract and an improved working and caregiving experience in CCH.

Only then can we get back to doing what we do best. Serving our patients.

Thank you.

Thiesha Tiggs