



300 S. Ashland Ave. Suite 400, Chicago, IL 60607
312.787.5868 888.734.8573 Fax: 312.337.7768
www.SEIU73.org

TO: Cook County Health Finance Committee
RE: Proposed Transfer of Fund

Statement from Dian Palmer, President, SEIU Local 73

Chairman Reiter and distinguished members of the Cook County Health Finance Committee. SEIU Local 73 represents the largest number of workers within the Cook County Health System. Our members are frontline essential workers who have put their health and safety on the line throughout the pandemic to ensure Cook County residents receive quality care.

Our union and our members are committed to the Cook County Health and Hospital System. We believe that a well-funded, quality, public health system is essential for our community. Particularly the marginalized communities CCH serves and those left behind by the private healthcare system. It is in the best interest of both our organizations to work together as strategic partners advocating for a more robust health system.

Unfortunately, our relationship with Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle and the Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) have become obstacles to that strategic partnership. Contract negotiations have dragged on for more than nine months. Only yesterday, the County finally provided an economic offer that included only a 5.5% increase over four years and a 90% increase in health insurance costs for workers. This offer is insulting considering the County’s strong revenue estimates and the \$1 billion it is receiving in ARP funds. The continued disrespect shown by the County has resulted in our members overwhelmingly voting to strike for the second time in six months.

In response to our members’ 12-hour strike at CCH last December, President Preckwinkle chose to spend several million dollars on strikebreakers from high-risk COVID states, rather than address the immediate concerns of our members. Today, you will be voting to transfer \$10.4 million from the wage and salary budget. If the intent is to transfer these funds from so-called vacant positions to “bridge the gap” in staffing, the effect is the funds will be used to hire strikebreakers. This money would be better invested in wages and benefits to enhance recruitment and retention.

Make no mistake, hiring strikebreakers to replace CCH workers is a union-busting tactic and sends a clear message that CCH does not value its workers. We have provided every opportunity for CCH and President Preckwinkle to settle this matter with a fair contract and prevent a strike. We have offered to meet daily up to our proposed strike date in one week. By transferring these funds, and hiring strikebreakers, you will be demonstrating a decided lack of interest in reaching a settlement.

We urge this committee to not stay silent on this matter and join us in working towards a solution. Every day our members are working to save and protect the lives of their patients. All we are asking is for Cook County Health to treat our members with dignity and respect. I am confident that by working together we can find the solutions and make Cook County Health an employer and provider of choice.

Thank you.

Dian Palmer
President

Dian Palmer
President

Joseph Richert
Secretary-Treasurer

Jeffrey Howard
Executive Vice President

Science Meles
Executive Vice President

Roy Chavadijl
Vice President

Camille Redman
Vice President

Alfred Rodriguez
Vice President

Venus Roman-Valino
Vice President

Vee Steward
Vice President

Esteemed Chair and Finance Committee Members,

My name is Rolanda Watkins, I am a Registered Nurse in Care Coordination. I'm a leader in the National Nurses Organizing Committee and have worked at Stroger Hospital since 1993.

This week, Finance Committee Agenda Item III (D) suggested a Proposed Transfer of Funds for the Independent Board's approval. Detailed documents describing this transfer appeared a few days after the agenda was released, causing some confusion among our membership. With the help of our County Commissioners, we were able to locate the proposal to cut \$11M in healthcare worker salaries and wages at Stroger Hospital. These funds would then be transferred to contract maintenance, medical consultation services, and registry services within the same hospital.

As Cook County Health workers struggle to reach agreements in contract bargaining, the hospital has chosen to sidestep these good faith efforts; to simply replace nurses and ancillary staff with contract workers and consultants. It is shocking that CCHHS would prefer to spend millions of dollars to replace public employees rather than negotiate with them. Current nurse staffing plans, as approved by CCHHS, are impossible to achieve because of nearly 200 persistent vacancies; FTEs that are budgeted for but never filled. This dangerous understaffing is of grave concern to nurses who have faithfully served Chicagoans through an incomparably difficult year.

Nurses in the National Nurses United Bargaining Committee would like an explanation of these proposed transfers and to express our genuine concern for patient safety.

Rolanda Watkins