

Oregon Nurses Association announce contract vote at Providence Medford Emergency Department, as 5,000 nurses remain on strike

Bryan Dyne
21 January 2025

We invite medical workers at Providence and across the country to write to us about the conditions they face as a result of the ongoing social crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging threats of immigration raids on hospitals.

On Friday, the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) announced that the Pacific Northwest Hospital Medicine Association (PNWHMA) Southern Oregon Providers reached a “historic” contract for emergency services workers at Providence Medford. The same day, 5,000 nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers under the ONA at Providence facilities across the state entered into the third week of their strike.

According to the ONA, the contract contains “a 20.7% base wage increase for physicians, significant pay increases for [Advanced Practice Registered Nurses] and [physician assistants], and enhanced shift differentials, along with additional benefits for continuing education and workplace safety.”

The full contract, however, is not yet publicly available. According to the PNWHMA’s website, one can “access your contract” depending on worksite, noting that these are an “important resource.” When attempting to access the Medford ED Providers bargaining unit, however, the website merely states, “TBA” and states the same for the other seven bargaining units the union represents.

According to one worker on social media, it is possible the contract will not be available for nurses to review until after ratification. This is similar to the tactic used by the ONA in 2022 to get a new contract passed at Providence St. Vincent. Then, after nurses voted down a previous contract by more than 4 to 1 and voted overwhelmingly to strike, the ONA announced

an agreement with Providence, called off the strike and kept the full contract details hidden.

The full contract was only released shortly before the vote took place, and was essentially the same to the one previously voted down.

Providence Medford health workers should demand full access to the contract and two weeks to study it before any vote. To enforce this, and to link up with workers on strike across the state and the country, they should form a rank-and-file committee in order to impose democratic workers’ control over the process.

It is significant that the ONA did not bring the Medford Emergency Department workers out on strike along with the 380 nurses at Medford, who are among those striking Providence across the state. Instead, the ONA, which operates under the umbrella of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has kept these different sections of workers isolated from one another.

Nor has the ONA raised the serious danger of raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, which are being planned by the new Trump administration. According to a press release Tuesday by the Department of Homeland Security, “sensitive areas,” which have historically included schools, churches and hospitals and were largely out of bounds for immigration raids, will now be a target for such police-state actions.

Rank-and-file nurses, however, have expressed enormous concerns about the dangers they and their patients face. One nurse commented, “This is my greatest fear right now. We literally employ people from all over the world, some are [naturalized], some are on work permits, some are visas, we even have a

asylum seeker who was a translator. All my I9's are in place, ALL staff have copies of their docs on file.

"I worry for their families. These are GOOD PEOPLE who came here for a better life. The current admin is twisting a lot of this around. We need CNAs. The immigrants could be given permits, trained and work. It's literally what they are here for."

Another commented, "At least you don't have to ask each patient whether they are a US Citizen, like they have to in Texas. If they implemented that policy in any state I work in, I'm just checking the box and ALL of my patients are citizens."

There was also discussion on the implications of Trump's executive order attacking birthright citizenship. "I am 43 years old and was born to a U.S. Citizen and someone who came here on a student visa that was later converted to a green card. At the time of my birth, that green card had lapsed and was later renewed without issue. So my birth was to a U.S. citizen and, at the time, an illegal immigrant.

"If there is success in repealing the 14th amendment and repealing birthright citizen, my status in this country is questionable. I was born, raised and educated in this country. I'm a nurse working on my Masters degree. I've never been convicted of anything more than a speeding ticket. And yet I have potential to be deported to a country I've never lived in and don't speak the language of."

That the ONA has not openly repudiated the ongoing attacks on immigrants in particular and democratic rights as a whole is not surprising. Over the weekend, the union welcomed US Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) to the picket lines. Wyden, a member of the House of Representatives from 1981-1996 and a member of the Senate since 1996, has been a longtime supporter of the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative, which claimed to grant immigrant children protections from deportation.

In reality, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned as far back as 2012, the initiative did not stop deportations. Obama deported an estimated 2.7 million undocumented immigrants during his eight years in office, and Trump deported just under 1 million during his first term. And according to the Migration Policy Institute, the Biden administration deported or otherwise denied entry to nearly 4.4 million immigrants seeking to come to the United States.

Moreover, those that registered under DACA are now targets for the new and openly fascist White House. The Democrats, of which Wyden is a part and the ONA supports, in effect gave Trump and his conspirators a list of millions to arrest, imprison and deport.

The complicity of the ONA with the mass crimes being planned by the Trump administration makes it all the more imperative that nurses and other medical workers take the conduct of the ongoing strike and all contract negotiations out of the hands of the bureaucrats and place them under the democratic control of the rank and file. The alarm must be raised that there can be no genuine fight for safe staffing and higher wages without a concurrent political struggle against the colossal attacks now underway against the entire working class.

Above all, there is an urgent need for nurses to break with the Republicans, Democrats and trade unions and organize rank-and-file committees. These are organizations of, by and for the workers, to democratically enforce their economic demands, as well as their political will.

Such committees would connect with others under the umbrella of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and organize the broadest possible resistance to the planned immigration raids. Nurses at Providence must unite with their brothers and sisters among other healthcare workers at Kaiser Permanente, PeaceHealth and other hospital networks across Oregon, and throughout the working class as a whole.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact