

Negotiations **FAQs**

Answers to some frequently asked questions about contract negotiations

What is the current status of negotiations?

We began “common table” negotiations with the three CWA bargaining committees last month following “side table” negotiations with the individual bargaining committees at Kenmore Mercy, Mercy and Sisters Hospital, St. Joseph Campus, which began in February. As we proceed with common table negotiations, we are bargaining in good faith on matters that affect all six bargaining units. Some site-specific work groups have also been meeting to discuss a small number of side table matters that were not completed before common table negotiations began.

How does the negotiations process work?

Contract negotiations between the hospitals and CWA are governed by a federal law called the National Labor Relations Act. The law requires employers and unions negotiate in good faith to try to reach a new agreement. This includes meeting regularly, bringing proposals to the bargaining table, responding to each other’s proposals, and working toward consensus. The current contracts are the starting point for bargaining as we consider changes to address new needs and priorities, and provide flexibility to respond to market forces that impact our hospitals, like health-care reform, new regulations, and current economic conditions.

Why do we need changes in the contracts?

Like many other healthcare organizations in New York and across the country, we want to improve processes, identify new ways to provide quality patient care and service more efficiently, and provide associates with market-competitive wages and benefits. The COVID pandemic has had a significant and unexpected impact on Catholic Health and its hospitals. Regardless, we worked hard to care for our patients and community, ensure that our associates had sufficient access to required personal protective equipment, and provide hazard pay longer than any other healthcare system in WNY. Taking these necessary measures was in the best interest of our associates, community and hospitals, but it also led to unexpected expenses.

How long will negotiations take?

Generally, we are negotiating 2 - 3 days per week. At this point, we cannot predict how long negotiations will take. We are committed to bargaining in good faith, with a desire to reach fair successor contracts without any unnecessary disputes or delays.

What topics are being discussed?

We are discussing a number of economic and non-economic topics, including wages, benefits, and terms and conditions of employment.

Are the Hospitals asking for concessions?

In bargaining, the parties evaluate all aspects of the labor contract and suggest changes to some of them. There are some aspects of the current contracts where we think improvements should be made to help us operate more efficiently and deliver better quality care and service. We are committed to obtaining fair collective bargaining agreements that:

- Allow us to continue providing safe, high quality care and service to our patients
- Provide market-competitive wages and benefits to help us continue to attract and retain great associates
- Continue to foster a positive work experience and safe staffing

Is it illegal for management to talk with associates about negotiations?

No. Once management has presented the union with proposals at the bargaining table, we have a legal right to share those proposals with our associates and provide information on what is being discussed during negotiations. Sometimes, there may be rumors around negotiations and proposals. Catholic Health will provide regular updates on the proposals the hospitals have presented to make sure our managers and associates have the facts.

How can associates and managers learn about what’s happening at bargaining?

We will continue to provide regular updates to associates and managers. We have also created a website for the 2021 contract negotiations with CWA to help people stay informed. The website is accessible at: chsbuffalo.org/negotiations. Please check it frequently for updates and other negotiations-related content.

The hospital says one thing about negotiations. CWA says something else. Who should I believe?

We are committed to providing associates and others with fact-based information about negotiations. We encourage people to read the information we provide and get information from other sources too, to make their own informed decisions about the proposals that are being presented.

The CWA is asking members to wear union wristbands, bouffant caps and pins. Do CWA-represented associates have to take part in this?

No. Taking part in union activities – whether it’s wearing a wristband or headband, or participating in other union-sponsored events – is a personal decision that’s entirely up to each associate.