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Catholic Health Hospitals Offer Union Generous Wages & Benefits in Negotiations

This past Friday, negotiators for three Catholic Health (CH) hospitals presented a strong wage and benefit proposal to Communications Workers of America (CWA) union leaders. The package includes increased salaries while maintaining generous pension and health benefits, and staffing ratios that support hospital employees and maintain the highest quality patient outcomes in the region.

Negotiations between CH hospitals and CWA Locals 1133 and 1168 began in March under a new senior leadership team led by President & CEO Joyce Markiewicz—a nurse herself—and a new Chief Nursing Officer focused on strengthening the system and improving recruitment and retention rates. With support from an impartial mediator, the hospitals' leaders and the union exchanged several economic proposals in recent weeks as they worked toward tentative agreements for nearly 3,000 associates at Kenmore Mercy Hospital, Mercy Hospital of Buffalo, and Sisters of Charity Hospital—St. Joseph Campus.

Under the hospitals' proposal presented, a nurse right out of school would start at \$41.79/hour before adding pay for things like night and evening hours, extra shifts, and potential bonuses. In addition, CH health insurance remains one of the most comprehensive traditional health plans in the market, and its prescription plan takes advantage of the system's buying power to benefit its associates.

Markiewicz, who took the helm two years ago, has been committed to demonstrating respect and being fair and equitable in negotiations. "We put on the table an economic package that provides our valued nurses and team members with salaries and benefits that are highly competitive in our region," she said. "We urge all our associates to educate themselves on what the hospitals offered so they can understand how far we've come together in their favor in the face of national healthcare uncertainty."

Last week, CWA called for a strike authorization vote for Sept. 8, which CH hospital leaders said is somewhat surprising given the new offer that was presented. "After eight months of fair and realistic bargaining, we believe our latest offer gets our associates to where they want to be," Markiewicz said. "We believe that this commitment clearly demonstrates how much we value our nurses and staff, who along with our physicians, provide the high-quality care Catholic Health is known for."