Benton County Update – December 9, 2021

During these difficult times, we really appreciate the work that nurses do by caring for our community. It is also important that nurses take care of themselves.

As ONA members, we are also members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which provides mental health resources. Learn more here.

We have much important news to share in this message. If you cannot read it all now, please remember to come back and read the entire email.

BAKER, EDWARDS TO STEP DOWN

Angela Edwards and Robin Baker have both announced they will not serve as our co-chairs when their terms expire on March 15, 2022. They will remain as ONA stewards and have pledged to mentor our new executive officers.

During Robin and Angela’s time in office, we had many successes in our bargaining unit!

This year, under Robin and Angela’s leadership, our bargaining team (which also included Niki Kelley and Terry Deeds) bargained an amazing contract for the next four years. We moved the employer from pay for performance to a standard wage scale. Together, we succeeded in returning to a wage scale that is understandable and fair!

They led our pay for performance campaign, where a majority of nurses attended several meetings to demonstrate our unity before management. That campaign culminated in a mid-contract reopener to increase wages by 1.5% on top of existing cost of living increases in 2019. Wage reopeners are almost unheard of in union contracts! Angela and Robin were supported by Niki Kelley and Cindy D’Angiolillo who served as our representatives in that effort.

That campaign netted us the “Outstanding Bargaining Unit Leadership Award” at the 2020 ONA House of Delegates. We were selected from among more than 50 ONA bargaining units. We are small but mighty thanks to Angela and Robin’s efforts to build unity!

In February 2022, we will issue a call for candidates to fill the two co-chair positions.

OTHER COMMITTEES

We are also well-represented on other committees.
Jan Liebeskind attends the Labor Management Advisory Committee (LMAC) monthly with representatives from the other two unions. She is willing to step down from that role if someone else is interested.

Note the LMAC is separate from the Nurse Labor Management Advisory Committee (Nurse LMAC), which has been working on workload issues for the last few months. Tiffanie Correia and Robin Baker are our representatives on Nurse LMAC, supported by Gary Aguiar, our labor rep. We currently have two additional seats on Nurse LMAC which are unoccupied, if others want to exercise their leadership skills and join our group.

Dominica Roberts continues on the Benefits and Wellness Committee, where she advocates for positive changes in health care insurance and related matters. She would welcome the participation of a second nurse to bolster our voice alongside coworkers represented by the other two unions.

As you can see, our co-chairs are supported by other leaders. Please thank all of them for their leadership.

POSSIBLE AFSCME STRIKE

We recently met with Human Resources to address three pressing issues, including a possible strike by our siblings represented by AFSCME. They continue to bargain with the employer and the County remains hopeful they will settle. Before AFSCME could move to strike, several steps would need to happen.

Under Oregon’s Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA), one side or the other could declare an impasse, which would trigger a seven-day period where both sides would present their final offer, including costing. Then, a 30-day cooling-off period occurs before the employer could implement their final offer and/or the union could provide a 10-day notice of a strike. So, it would be nearly seven weeks after the declaration of an impasse before a strike could occur.

Under PECBA, other unions cannot engage in sympathy strikes, where we walk off the job. Simply put, we must continue to work, including crossing the picket line. We asked HR if they anticipated furloughing nurses in our bargaining unit during such a strike. The employer reported they have yet to have those discussions internally. We all know there is a lot of work to do and they expect to continue needing nurses to work their full hours.

If bargaining proceeds down this path, we will have more information for you. We support our AFSCME coworkers in getting the best deal possible. No one likes a strike; it is the last tool we use in bargaining. However, sometimes a strike is necessary to move the employer.

EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE PAY AND RECLASSIFICATION

We asked about two other issues at our meeting with HR on December 6.

Recently, three nurses were nominated by coworkers for Exceptional Performance Pay, a new provision in our contract in §13.7. The nominations seemed to stop at the manager level, but the
director makes the formal recommendation. We wanted to understand the process better. HR suggested that the nominated nurses have a conversation with their manager about why their cases were not considered. We will bring the nominations directly to the appropriate director for their consideration. Again, stay tuned for more information.

Earlier this summer, we asked HR to review five nurses who we thought should be reclassified from a C43 to C45. HR agreed that one of the five should immediately be reclassified to a C45. That nurse has been reclassified as a C45 and is on the higher pay scale.

Two other nurses lacked sufficient years to be reclassified now. However, one of them will be eligible for a C45 reclassification in a few months and the other nurse in three years.

Two nurses did not have a certification or degree to be reclassified to C45 under the classification specifications. In our conversation, HR supported our idea of a “professional development” path to certification. One of these nurses has been working with a provider. The nurse has engaged in a course of study related to her position that could qualify as a less-formal certification. Robin and Angela will work with those nurses and HR to document/develop that work.

For more information, text/call Gary at 503-444-0690 or Aguiar@OregonRN.org.