Next Steps

On Wednesday, September 12, management made a “final offer package” to the ONA bargaining team. This package represents the sum total of what SABC management is willing to agree to at this time. By presenting us with a final package, the employer is signaling to us that they are unwilling/unable to make further movement in negotiations. We were not expecting this at the conclusion of our ninth bargaining session! Management had not indicated that we were nearing impasse nor had they requested that we enter into mediation. Typically, the bargaining parties will mutually agree to mediation, with the assistance of an assigned Federal mediator, to avoid reaching impasse.

If the membership does not vote to approve this package, the two teams will have to return to the bargaining table. It is unclear at this time whether management will implement their “final offer package”, regardless of our ratification vote, as they have the legal right to do so. Since we have already held an informational picket/Rally, we believe management will not improve their package without a significant increase in concerted action from ALL bargaining unit members, which could mean withholding our labor in the form of a strike. Should management move to implement their “final offer package” our only recourse would be to go on strike, which begins by conducting a vote to authorize a strike.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT STRIKES.

If we vote NO on the ratification vote, our only recourse to fight for a potentially better contact is by withholding our labor. It is our strongest form of action we can take, and a huge risk. It would take a commitment from ALL OF US.

WHY DO NURSES STRIKE?
Strikes are union nurses’ most powerful tool when multimillion and multibillion-dollar health systems refuse to listen to frontline caregivers and patients! The value of our work and ONA nurses’ strength in numbers make a strike a very significant form of leverage at the bargaining table. Health care workers with the highest contract standards— including St. Charles Bend, Kaiser, OHSU and parts of the Providence System—have used strike declarations and strikes to make substantial improvements in their local hospitals including stronger patient safety standards, industry-leading wages, comprehensive benefits packages, safe nurse staffing language, break RNs, and other improvements.

WHAT IS A STRIKE AUTHORIZATION VOTE?
When a negotiating committee has worked at the bargaining table for several months, they may ask their coworkers to vote yes in supporting their bargaining team and declaring a strike if things don’t change, or if a “last,
best, and final” proposal is made and implemented. In the Pacific Northwest, ONA nurses at St. Charles Bend and Providence have recently held successful strike authorization votes—and OHSU is holding one right now.

WHO GETS TO VOTE TO STRIKE?
Strikes are only effective if we’re ALL committed. Therefore, every represented nurse is included in a vote and asked to support their bargaining team’s request to authorize a strike.

ARE OUR JOBS SAFE IF WE STRIKE?
It is illegal to terminate workers for striking. Thousands of health care workers have gone on strike across the West Coast and consistently return to their positions.

ARE OUR PATIENTS SAFE IF WE STRIKE?
If we go on strike, it will be to make sure our patients have better patient care, now and in the future. Nurses will give Saint Alphonsus plenty of notice of our intent to strike so Saint Alphonsus executives have time to meet and reach an agreement with us or make arrangements for patients to receive care elsewhere.

DO WORKERS RECEIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT DURING STRIKES?
Workers are eligible for support in cases of extreme hardship, however financial support will not equal wage replacement. ONA RNs are part of a 16,000 member union in Oregon and more than a million-member national union of health care workers and teachers (AFT). Nurses can access strike funds and mutual aid support through ONA and AFT in cases of extreme hardship.

ARE MY HEALTH BENEFITS PROTECTED IF WE STRIKE?
Health care workers rarely face an interruption in health benefits for participating in a strike because workers pay their health benefits at the beginning of each month.

HOW DO WE DECIDE TO GO ON STRIKE?
ONA is a democratic union and an overwhelming majority of represented nurses have to commit to going on strike. It includes your nurse bargaining team asking every represented nurse to support strike authorization. Then, we vote if the support is there. If an overwhelming majority of nurses vote for it, your bargaining team can declare a strike.

HOW LONG DO WE STRIKE?
Your bargaining team will determine the duration of a strike based on how we can best attain the leverage to achieve the needs of every RN. After making that determination, they'll seek approval from ONA's nurse labor cabinet. After it's approved, we will move forward and announce the duration of a strike.

WHAT KINDS OF STRIKES ARE THERE?
There are unfair labor practice strikes and economic strikes. Unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes occur when an employer breaks the law, and the union files unfair labor practice charges against the employer (ONA has filed a ULP at Saint Alphonsus).

Your position is protected per the National Labor Relations Act in a ULP strike. Economic strikes are directly related to an unwillingness of the employer to provide fair economic proposals. It is illegal to terminate workers for striking.

CAN I STRIKE ON PROBATION?
Yes, no one can be retaliated against for standing with their coworkers during a strike.

WILL I STILL GET PAID IF I'M ON AN APPROVED PAID LEAVE?
Yes, If you're on an approved leave (vacation, FMLA, etc.), you will be paid per the approved request. If Saint Alphonsus attempts to not provide compensation reach out to a union rep.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions. Rhonda Kenny, Labor Rep. (Kenny@OregonRN.Org).