



ST. CHARLES WORKERS TELL HOSPITAL SYSTEM "DO THE MATH!" (PHOTO)

August 24, 2022 (Bend, OR) – Members of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) and the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP) at St. Charles Health System facilities in Central Oregon have launched a petition drive indicating they “no longer have confidence in their employer’s accounting and payroll practices.” The petition is in response to an ongoing cascade of errors and failures on the part of St. Charles that has resulted in more than \$2 million in alleged overpayments, alleged underpayments, and ongoing demands for reimbursement. Union members are pledging they will not agree to any repayment plan proposed by St. Charles until an independent third-party audit has been conducted providing specific detail on when, or if, overpayments occurred.

The full text of the petition reads:

“We, the employees of the St. Charles Health System, no longer have confidence in our employer’s accounting and payroll practices due to the litany of errors claimed to have been made within the past year. We will not agree on any repayment plans for alleged overpayment by St. Charles unless and until a third-party independent audit has been conducted which proves overpayments occurred, including the specific dates and amounts of the overpayment(s) in question. Should St. Charles seek recoupment of alleged overpayment through payroll deduction without express permission, we will seek any and all remedies, legal and otherwise.”

“Staff are furious,” said Joel Hernandez, a nurse at St. Charles Bend and Vice-President of the ONA Board of Directors. “We are hearing from workers who got a check in March because St. Charles said they were underpaid. Those same staff are now hearing from St. Charles that, in fact, those payments were also wrong, and the nurses have to pay those funds back. When pushed, St. Charles says they do not have the capacity to help workers figure out if they owe money or not.”

In an email to ONA labor staff, Hillary Forrest, Director of Human Resources said, “We (St. Charles) have taken steps to ensure that each caregiver has the tools needed to verify our calculations of amounts due...Once the caregiver has confirmed the accuracy of the overpayments, they need to provide us with a written commitment telling us their preference for repayment on or before August 29, 2022.”

“So, basically, what we heard from St. Charles is ‘We sent you a bill. Now it is up to you to determine if we got the amount right,’” said Hernandez. “It’s outrageous. St. Charles’ payroll system failed for over four months and now, nurses and other front line health care providers are being told we must do the math on St. Charles’ behalf?”

In another email Nicole Ponder, Manager of St. Charles' Human Resources, wrote "it would be very time-consuming and burdensome for us (St. Charles) to try to provide all the backup data for each bargaining unit member. We simply don't have the resources to do that."

"I can guarantee you if I handed St. Charles a post-it note listing all of my missed lunches and rest breaks, they wouldn't just take my word for it," said ONA nurse Megan Bovi, who has worked at St. Charles for 15 years. "They would ask for documentation and evidence. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars here, without good evidence or documentation. No one would just roll over and agree to pay money back without evidence, but this is exactly what St. Charles is expecting us to do."

Both unions are calling upon St. Charles management to immediately engage the services of an outside, independent auditing firm to address this issue and provide clarity and detail for health care workers.

"We need transparency and accountability regarding claims of overpayment since this could leave our members thousands of dollars in debt," says Frank DeWolf, an Electrophysiology Technologist at St. Charles and a member of OFNHP. "Without a complete audit we have no way of ensuring the amounts being proposed to our members are actually accurate."

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) is the state's largest nursing organization. We are a professional association and labor union which represents more than 15,000 nurses and allied health workers throughout the state including nearly 1,200 frontline nurses working at multiple St. Charles Health facilities in Central Oregon. We are a proud state affiliate of AFT and the American Nurses Association. ONA's mission is to advocate for nursing, quality health care and healthy communities. For more information visit: www.OregonRN.org.

Founded in 1979, **the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP)**, AFT Local 5017 is a union of more than 5,000 nurses and health professionals in Oregon and SW Washington including nearly 150 workers at St. Charles. We know that when healthcare workers are united across job classifications and disciplines, we become a more powerful voice for our patients, our community, and ourselves. For more information visit: www.ofnhp.org