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20,000 University of California Patient Care & Service Workers Announce STRIKE VOTE

California – On the heels of University of California’s ongoing executive pay scandals, UC’s Administration is once again being denounced for misplaced priorities. For ten months, 20,000 UC’s medical and service workers have been trying to protect quality patient care and CA communities, reporting that lack of competitive wages is impacting the University’s ability to retain its best staff. After ten months of negotiating for **equal pay for equal work**, they have reached impasse, and the workers announced they will take a strike vote, running from May 17th-May 22nd.

The 20,000 patient care and service workers do everything from assisting in surgery to cleaning campus dorms. Unfortunately, UC medical centers are bleeding experienced patient care staff to other hospitals where pay is dramatically higher, and campus service workers live in poverty with wages as low as \$10 per hour. **Other hospitals and California’s community colleges pay an average of 25% higher for the same work.**

At UC hospitals, healthcare workers report that lack of competitive pay is contributing to high-turnover, staffing shortages, and over-reliance on temps. They are concerned this is compromising patient care and increasing the risk of complications. For service staff at the campuses and hospitals, wages are low enough for workers to qualify for public assistance. Many live in poverty and are forced to work two jobs, taking time away from their families and communities.

Workers have been negotiating for equal pay for equal work since August, 2007. However, UC Executives fell far short of that, forcing the 20,000 to take a strike vote. Statewide voting at ten campuses and five medical centers will run from May 17th through May 22nd. A press conference will be held on Friday, May 23rd to announce the results.

“This is a matter of priorities. UC Executives need to ensure UC keeps its best staff by paying equal pay for equal work,” said Lakesha Harrison, Licensed Vocational Nurse & President of AFSCME Local 3299, “UC is losing good people to other hospitals where pay is about 25% higher, we are concerned this is causing staffing shortages and over-reliance on temps. That’s not the kind of patient care people expect from UC.”

UC executives can fulfill the University’s strong public mission by financially prioritizing retention of patient care staff and ensuring that service workers’ families can positively contribute to the State’s economy. UC hospitals profited \$371 million in 2006, UC Executive pay continues to rise with salaries topping \$646K, bonuses as high as \$83K, and total compensation of up to \$924,642. Moody Investor Services cited that UC has a “healthy and consistent operating performance, with operating cash flow in excess of \$2 billion driven by a highly diversified revenue stream.” **State funds comprise only 8.6% of the funding for these workers.**

According to CA State-appointed neutral Factfinder Carol Vendrillo, who independently evaluated the viability of a service workers’ labor agreement, this is a matter of priorities, rather than resources. *“U.C. has demonstrated the ability to increase compensation when it fits with certain priorities without any demonstrable link to a state funding source...It is time for UC to take a broader view of its priorities by honoring the important contribution that service workers make to the U.C. community and compensating them with wages that are in line with the competitive market rate.”*

The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299, AFL-CIO represents 21,000 patient care and service workers at the University of California including licensed vocational nurses, medical techs and assistants, respiratory therapists, custodians, cafeteria workers, and security officers.

2201 Broadway Ave, Suite 315 Oakland, CA 94612, (510) 844-1160, media@afscme3299.org

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