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AND PENSIONS

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August 22, 2023

Mark E. Manigan  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
RWJ Barnabas Health  
95 Old Short Hills Road  
West Orange, NJ 07052

Dear Mr. Manigan:

I am writing to urge RWJ Barnabas Health (RWJBH) to bargain in good faith with United Steel Workers (USW) Local 4-200 and come to agreement on a fair contract for nurses at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) that provides for safe staffing standards, living wages, and affordable and quality health care.

RWJUH nurses report reduced staffing to the point that nurses across the hospital are now caring for unsafe numbers of patients. I have been told that ICU and pediatric nurses are being spread too thin, and as a result, nurses are rapidly burning out while patients are not receiving the attention they need. Rather than agreeing to safe staffing ratios, the hospital's most recent offer instead effectively penalizes nurses for using the sick time to which they are legally entitled. That is simply unacceptable.

While RWJBH continues to make millions in revenues, the wages for the nurses at RWJUH are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living. It is absurd for RWJBH to claim it can afford to pay its executives millions, yet is somehow unable to provide its nurses fair raises. Instead of negotiating in good faith, the hospital offered a \$1 an hour raise for on-call shifts only, which, after adjusting for inflation, would amount to a significant pay cut.

It is also unconscionable that, while working long hours to provide quality health care, RWJBH nurses are not guaranteed that same quality health care. By restricting employees' health plans to providers within the RWJBH system, the hospital has the means and ability to reduce costs and provide affordable health care benefits to its workers. Instead, the hospital continues to see nurses' health costs as another means to profit and has refused to provide a meaningful counteroffer in recent negotiations.

Instead of bargaining in good faith to reach a fair contract, I have been told the hospital is paying travel nurses upwards of \$300 an hour, on top of hotel and travel expenses. These travel nurses are also reportedly working under the same—if not better—conditions the RWJUH nurses are demanding with safer staffing ratios. Moreover, the fact that nurses have been forced to resort to striking over unfair labor practices is deeply troubling.

Let's be clear: if RWJBH can afford to hire these replacement nurses and pay their executives millions each year, they can afford a contract that keeps nurses safe and provides living wages and good benefits. These workers have been on the frontlines in our fight against COVID-19 and have risked their lives to save patients under challenging conditions. They deserve better.

I urge RWJUH to return to the negotiating table and bargain in good faith and end its unfair labor practices. This is your opportunity to do the right thing and work with your employees to improve your hospital for workers and patients. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders

Chair

U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

CC: Bill Arnold, Executive Vice President, Southern Region  
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Nancy E. Holecek, Executive Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer  
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