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Nurses and Healthcare Professionals from Warren General Hospital Hold an Informational Picket to Call Attention to the Staffing Issues Inside Their Hospital

*Nurses and healthcare professionals from Warren General Hospital stood together outside the hospital to alert the community to the unsafe conditions within it and to implore management to prioritize patient safety and take immediate action to fully staff the hospital. **The caregivers want management to agree to include safe staffing guidelines in their contract, guaranteeing a minimum level of nursing care for each patient.***

Warren, PA - The nurses and healthcare workers at Warren General Hospital have been on the front lines of the COVID pandemic for 18 months, sacrificing their own health and endangering their families to care for their community and keep the doors of the hospital open. Now, in bargaining for a new contract, hospital management has resisted the caregivers' calls to properly staff the hospital and include staffing grids in the new contract.

When caregivers have too many patients, patients don't get the focused, attentive care they need and deserve, and staff retention suffers, further compounding the problem.

According to a landmark study (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/195438>) comparing patient outcomes in California, where nurse-to-patient ratios are mandated, and patient outcomes in Pennsylvania, where they are not, the odds of patient mortality increase by 7 percent for every additional patient in the average nurse's workload.

"We have a law in Pennsylvania that limits the number of children who can be assigned to a childcare worker in daycare centers--why don't sick children have the same protection?" asks PASNAP President Maureen May, R.N. "We desperately need safe minimum staffing levels in our hospitals. When healthcare workers are routinely required to care for more patients than is safe, it's called chronic short-staffing, and it is a crisis for both patients and staff."

"We signed our last contract just prior to the beginning of this horrible pandemic that has engulfed all of our lives," says maternity unit nurse Charlene Fohrd, R.N., an 8-year Warren General Hospital veteran and co-president of the Warren General Hospital Professional Employees Association, the union of nurses, social workers and medical technologists there. "Through it all, the staff at Warren have worked tirelessly to provide world-class care to each and every patient who walks through our doors. We're still doing that, although the pandemic has exacerbated what is now our biggest challenge--staffing. Prior to the pandemic, our union had 120 members; today, we're down to 97. Fewer staff means more patients per caregiver, and that isn't safe for patients or caregivers."

According to data collected by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, enrollment in the commonwealth's R.N. programs has increased by almost 50 percent in recent decades. But hospitals can't retain nurses at the bedside under increasingly unsafe conditions.

Caregiver retention is a patient safety issue, yet Warren General Hospital is proposing to eliminate contributions to their employees' retirements--contributions that have already been frozen for two years. They say they can't afford it, but their financials tell a different story.

In the first two months of their fiscal year 2021, the hospital has already generated \$1.5 million in revenue. CEO Rick Allen was paid \$537,599 in 2020. Yet they want to take away benefits from their dedicated caregivers. **This is not just unfair, these cuts could compound the staffing issues in the hospital, driving staff away from the bedside.**

"In 2019, we knew the hospital had financial issues and we decided to give them a break to reclaim a strong financial footing. The way we helped was by pausing our retirement benefit," says Fohrd. "This was a sacrifice the working professionals who are the backbone of our hospital were willing to do, because we care for our community. And because of our sacrifice, the hospital recovered. They are on stronger financial footing than they have been in years, and management has begun multi-million dollar plans to invest in our building. But we fear that our hospital administration has forgotten that a beautiful hospital with no staff is just an empty building.

"We need to recruit and retain the staff we have so that we can provide the care our community deserves," says Fohrd. "That's why we're outside the hospital, fighting for safer staffing and for the health of our families, our friends and our community. Patient care needs to come before hospital profits."

PASNAP, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, represents more than 9,000 nurses and healthcare professionals across the Commonwealth. The Warren General Hospital Professional Employees Association is a local of PASNAP.