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**St. Mary Nurses Vote Overwhelmingly to Authorize a Strike**

*The nurses at St. Mary Medical Center organized more than a year ago over grave understaffing and patient safety concerns. Yet hospital executives have refused to put basic patient protections and fairness for nurses in writing in the nurses’ contract. Yesterday, the nurses signaled that they are willing to strike to guarantee patient safety.*

**Langhorne, PA** - Pushed to the brink by understaffing that undermines patient safety and signals a lack of respect for their calling as caregivers, the nurses at St. Mary Medical Center organized and won their union election on August 23rd, 2019. They have been bargaining with management for a first contract since last October, but St. Mary owner Michigan-based Trinity Health Systems has so far refused to include minimum safe staffing levels in the nurses’ contract.

**Trinity’s outright refusal to agree to minimum safe staffing levels—as well as unfair labor practice charges—has led the nurses to vote overwhelmingly to authorize a strike, with 85 percent of nurses voting in favor.**

“My unit is a stepdown unit for patients who need a significant level of care,” says Casey Szczepowksi, R.N., who has worked at St. Mary Medical Center for more than six years. “We should have nine nurses and three aides at night; our current schedule has multiple nights with as few as five or six nurses and one aide. That’s for 26 patients! I worry about patients when our staffing is so low, and I worry about our nurses, too. A number of my RN colleagues have left St Mary in the past couple of months to go to hospitals that respect nurses more. I’m proud that the St Mary nurses are standing together to tell Trinity to do what’s right for our community.”

Headquartered in Livonia, Michigan, Trinity is one of the country’s largest nationwide healthcare organizations, encompassing more than 90 hospitals and behavioral health facilities. With $8.8 billion in cash and investments on hand as of March 30th of this year, Trinity is also well capitalized. St. Mary made an average of $44 million a year in profit over the last four fiscal years ending June 30th, 2020. It is one of Trinity’s most profitable hospitals.

“All we’re asking for is a commitment by the hospital to a basic minimum level of safety for our patients,” says Donna Cupitt, R.N., who has been at St. Mary for 31 years. “Who wouldn’t do that?”

“A number of my colleagues in the OR have recently left, and the hospital’s solution is for us to do more with less by taking more on-call hours,” says Carey-Beth James, R.N., an operating room nurse for more than 10 years. “I worry about our patients when staff are forced to work through fatigue. Our professional standards recommend rest periods that Trinity isn’t providing and hasn’t agreed to in our union contract. The St. Mary nurses are fighting and will keep fighting for safety and patient care standards. It’s time for Trinity to do the right thing. I hope yesterday’s vote is a wake-up call for them.”

The strike authorization vote allows the union’s Bargaining Committee to submit a 10-day strike notice to the hospital if they deem it necessary. Today, the hospital’s bargaining team abruptly left the last scheduled and agreed-upon negotiating session with the nurses an hour and 25 minutes early, despite the nurses’ desire to continue the conversation on enhanced patient protections.

“The first wave of COVID-19 was incredibly frightening, and we’re staring at what could be a devastating second wave in the face,” says Debbi Bozeman, R.N., who has been with St. Mary for 11 years. ”Our community had our backs during the first wave, with large donations of PPE. The hospital doesn’t seem to be as generous, even with basic respect for what we did and what we are about to do again, risking our lives and those of our families for the hospital and for our community.”

Nurses at St. Mary’s sister hospital, the Trinity-owned Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital in Delaware County, share the same serious staffing concerns. On Tuesday, the Mercy Fitz nurses picketed outside their hospital because they too want to ensure basic minimum staffing levels in their contract.

The Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals represents 8,500 nurses and healthcare professionals across the Commonwealth. Approximately 800 of those nurses work at St. Mary Medical Center; approximately 260 nurses work at Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital.