**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Friday, November 5, 2020**

**CONTACT: Megan Othersen Gorman/mgorman@pasnap.com/215-817-5781**

**St. Chris and Einstein Nurses Vote Overwhelmingly to Authorize Strikes**

*The nurses at St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children and Einstein Medical Center, two of Philadelphia’s crucial safety-net hospitals, signaled yesterday that they are willing to strike to guarantee patient safety after hospital executives repeatedly refused to put basic patient protections and fairness for nurses in writing in the nurses’ contracts.*

**Philadelphia, PA** - Pushed to the brink by understaffing that seriously undermines patient safety and signals a lack of respect for their calling as caregivers, the nurses at St. Chris and at Einstein each voted overwhelmingly last night to authorize simultaneous strikes.

**Represented across the table by the same legal counsel, executives from both hospitals have repeatedly refused to include bare-minimum safe-staffing levels in the nurses’ contracts, even though numerous, highly experienced nurses from both institutions have raised grave concerns about patient safety at the hospitals’ current staffing levels—concerns that are especially critical given the rising tide of civic unrest and soaring case counts of COVID-19 in Philadelphia currently.**

St. Christopher’s 500 nurses organized with PASNAP in 2016, in large part due to chronic short staffing that endangered children. In their 2018 contract, the nurses were offered a larger raise if they agreed to keep patient care standards out of the contract—they nixed that proposal to ensure that the children of Philadelphia would have the care they needed at the bedside. Last December, St. Chris was purchased by Reading-based Tower Health and Drexel University. On the day of purchase, the St. Chris nurses were informed that management would no longer recognize their contract, including the enforceable safe-staffing levels they had fought so hard for in 2018.

“When Tower and Drexel bought St. Chris, they felt it wasn’t necessary to have staffing enforcement language,” said Maria Plano, R.N., co-vice president of St. Christopher’s Nurses United. “The reason why we know we need it is that they haven’t been staffing us adequately. We don’t see why corporate, desk-sitting executives should make the decision as to what patients and nurses need on the floor.”

Recently, staff reductions in the Emergency Department, among other departments, have rendered the hospital, a Level 1 trauma center, ill prepared to deal with multiple, simultaneous traumas, even though violence affecting children in the city is high.

“Gun violence has been increasing in Philadelphia,” says Becky Murphy, R.N., an Emergency Department nurse at St. Chris. “As a Level 1 trauma center, St. Christopher’s Hospital for children is the primary place children with traumatic injuries in North Philadelphia and the surrounding communities go for care. In this last year, devastating cuts have been made to the nursing and support staff in our Emergency Department. These cuts significantly increase the burden on our staff during an already difficult and unprecedented time in healthcare. Now more than ever, we need to be fully staffed. Staffing grids ensure that we have the appropriate staffing to safely provide excellent care for all patients. Without these grids intact, we continue to do more with less hindering our abilities to provide safe and excellent care.  The children of Philadelphia and their families deserve to receive the best care we can provide.”

Similarly, staff cuts at Einstein have resulted in a serious staffing shortage in many of the hospital’s units, and high turnover has resulted in a lack of experienced nurses, causing unsafe conditions for patients and dangerous working conditions for hospital staff. Yet management has repeatedly refused to implement safer staffing ratios to protect patients at the bedside.

“To work short-staffed the majority of your shifts means you can’t be with your patient who is dying when they can’t have a family member visit because there was/is a pandemic going on,” says Allison Connors, RN, an Einstein nurse on Tower 6. “It means you rush in and out of rooms, hoping the patient’s needs are quick and simple. It means that if they’re not quick and simple, another patient’s needs go unmet. It means you can’t even take a 30-minute break in your 12-hour shift. It means you go home exhausted and can’t enjoy your family. It means your patients suffer, you suffer and your own family suffers.”

Like St. Chris, Einstein claims it has no money to staff the hospital adequately. But CEO Barry Freedman received a roughly 100 percent wage increase for the fiscal year ending July 2019. That raise alone—about $2 million (plus bonuses)--could provide hazard pay for more than a thousand nurses or provide free charge on all units, 24/7, and Einstein’s CEO would still be a multimillionaire.

“How can we provide the best care if we don’t have enough nurses?” ask Jenny Dusseck, R.N., an Einstein nurse on Levy 6. “And how is that even remotely acceptable?”

Safety-net hospitals like St. Chris and Einstein largely serve communities of color, the poor and the most vulnerable among us. Throughout the COVID crisis, as Einstein nurses risked their own lives in order to care for a surrounding community disproportionately impacted by the deadly virus, management failed to provide proper PPE, testing and adequate staffing.

“I wish management would just for a day walk in our shoes—or in a patient’s,” says Connors. “The acuity of our patients has increased tenfold, especially in the last eight months, and yet we have fewer resources to help. We need more. Our patients need more.”

**The strike authorization votes allow the unions’ Bargaining Committees to submit 10-day strike notices to their respective hospitals if they deem it necessary.**

The Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals represents 8,500 nurses and healthcare professionals across the Commonwealth. Approximately 500 of those nurses work at St. Christopher’s; approximately 1,000 nurses work at Einstein.