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As Incidents of Workplace Violence Escalate at the Hospital, Butler Memorial Hospital Nurses To Picketed Today to Call Out Owner Independence Health For Failing to Respect and Protect The Front Line

Butler, PA – 499 Butler Memorial Hospital nurses are negotiating a new contract for the first time since Excela Health and Butler Health System merged on January 1, 2023, to form the Independence Health System. As incidents of workplace violence escalate inside the hospital, respect and protection have emerged as dual themes in the nurses' negotiations. Today, as word of yet another incident of workplace violence surfaced (an ICU nurse was assaulted by a patient last night) and management continues to turn a blind eye to the nurses' safety, hundreds of Butler RNs picketed outside the hospital to call out management's callous disregard and inform the community about what's going on inside their hospital.

"Rural Butler is not immune from violence," said longtime Butler Memorial ICU nurse Tammy May, RN, President of Pennsylvania Independent Nurses, the PASNAP Local at Butler Memorial. "Our President was shot here in Butler, after all. Weapons are getting in the hospital, nurses are getting injured, and security failures are a near constant."

In the last few weeks alone, staff at Butler Memorial have experienced numerous acts of violence, harassment, and threats to safety. A case manager was punched by a patient. Emergency Department nurses were hit by multiple patients. A doctor's life was threatened. A nursing assistant got her teeth knocked out in a violent incident in the ER. And just last night, an ICU nurse was brutally assaulted.

In bargaining, the nurses have requested numerous safety measures be put into place, including metal detectors at all entrances, increased security presence throughout the facility and grounds, and active enforcement of existing safety protocols. Management's response: Safety is expensive and not something they are willing to invest in.

"Safety isn't optional – it's essential," said Jennifer Fencil, RN, Union Treasurer and Telemetry Nurse. "For too long, safety has been underprioritized and, as a result, compromised. When that happens, retention suffers and then care becomes compromised. It's a vicious cycle in which both caregivers and patients suffer."

"We care for our patients when they're at their most vulnerable, we worry about their safety – I shouldn't have to worry about mine," said Butler ICU nurse Shannon Herrington, RN, vice president of Pennsylvania Independent Nurses. "The hospital has proved in the past to be reactive, not proactive. I want them to be proactive about the safety of everyone at the hospital – patients and healthcare workers alike."

"Ensuring our safety would be a powerful act of respect," added Fencil. "It would say, 'We value you as the protectors of our community, and we will protect you."

Butler Mayor Bob Dandoy, who spoke at a noon rally during the picket, spoke reverently of the Butler nurses as "the helpers" – a reference to a quote by Mr. Fred Rogers. The former television host said his mother responded to scary news by telling him, "Look for the helpers."

Another elected official, who was unable to make it to the rally, sent a strong message:

"I'm the proud son of a hair dresser and a union bus driver," said Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis. "Unions helped build America's middle class, and my dad's union provided our family with opportunities that helped me get to where I am today. Unions don't just advocate for their members – they are fighting for all of us. The Butler Memorial nurses are pushing for a safer environment for their patients and all of the hospital's workers. I stand in solidarity with Butler Memorial's nurses and urge management to address the concerns outlined by the union."

"Safety isn't negotiable," says Emergency Department nurse Cara Buckley RN. "It isn't an option or a bargaining chip. *Nursing is a team sport. If you hurt one of us, you hurt all of us and we stand united for each other and our patients in making Butler Memorial Hospital a safer place to work and to heal by enhancing safety, by conferring respect for the nursing staff, and by making sure we are staffed properly to protect each other and our patients by providing excellent, life-saving care."*

An informational picket is an event that helps raise community awareness; the caregivers who attended the informational picket were either off from work that day or on a break.

Summary of issues attached.

Pennsylvania Independent Nurses at Butler Memorial Hospital is an affiliate of PASNAP, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, which represents more than 11,000 frontline nurses and healthcare professionals across Pennsylvania and was founded 25 years ago on the belief that patients do better when critical care staff have a strong voice to advocate for their patients and themselves.

