

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING



A picket line of union dentists

A group of dentists spent their lunch hour on a picket line Feb. 27 — to let members of the public know they want a fair contract.

Last spring, 28 dentists employed at seven Multnomah County clinics voted to join Oregon AFSCME after the county increased their patient load 20 percent in 2017 — to about 22 patients a day — without giving them any say in the matter, or any increase in compensation.

Union and management have been negotiating since late August, but they've had a hard time reaching agreement on a first

contract.

Pay is a key sticking point. Oregon AFSCME rep Eben Pullman says dentists working at Multnomah County Health Department are underpaid compared to other dentists locally. The job requires a doctoral degree in dental medicine or dental surgery, but their starting pay is just over \$100,000, and annual pay tops out at \$161,000, compared to top pay of \$220,000 for dentists at the Veterans Administration, \$193,000 in the state corrections system, \$175,000 at the non-profit Virginia Garcia clinic network, and \$170,000 for

dentists at Clackamas County.

Dentists also want a standard union grievance and arbitration process so that dentists can defend themselves in cases of discipline; county managers instead want to create a kind of disciplinary panel made up of dentists, a proposal the union thinks could be unworkable.

On Feb. 12, a delegation presented a petition to Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury signed by a majority of the dentists, and explained their position to her directly.

The two sides will next meet to bargain on April 1.

UNIONIZATION → JAN-FEB 2019

The following are Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces where workers have decided whether to be represented by a union. The thumbs-up symbol means workers will be union-represented. Thumbs-down means they'll be on their own. "Decert" means a decertification election, where union-represented workers voted whether to remain union. The information comes from the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

Union election results

Employer (Location) Union	Yes-No
United Way Columbia-Willamette (Portland) CWA Local 7901 ■ 32 campaign staff employees	12-14 🇺🇸
Student Transportation Inc. (Sandy) Teamsters Local 206 DECERT ■ 51 school bus drivers	24-23 🇺🇸
Providence Portland Medical Center (Portland) SEIU Local 49 ■ 838 non-professional support workers, including cooks, housekeepers, and CNAs	383-382 🇺🇸
ATI Cast Products (Albany) United Steelworkers ■ 498 production and maintenance employees	285-179 🇺🇸
Peacehealth St. John Medical Center (Longview) SEIU Local 49 ■ 11 communications operators	10-1 🇺🇸

Unionization by majority signup

Employer (Location) Union
Oregon Health & Science University (Portland) Oregon AFSCME ■ 251 graduate students seeking PhD degrees who receive stipends
Lane Transit District (Eugene) Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 ■ 8 fare inspectors and public safety officers
Oregon Dept. of Geology and Mineral Industries (Portland) SEIU Local 503 ■ 30 employees

...County looks at union neutrality for contractors

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ments" was struck down by a federal district court in 2005 because of a 1959 Supreme Court decision that says certain kinds of local labor laws are preempted by the National Labor Relations Act.

A "union-neutrality" ordinance could prove to be one of several reforms aimed at improving Multnomah County services. In 2017, the county hired the non-profit Human Services Research Institute to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of county-funded mental health and addiction services. The group published its findings last June in a 130-page report that validated what Oregon AFSCME had been saying for years: Low pay and heavy caseloads at county mental health service providers are making it hard for them to recruit and retain staff, resulting in high turnover and lower quality services.

In fact, those conditions have spurred workers at several non-profits to unionize. At Volunteers of America Oregon, 70 workers at two addiction treatment centers unionized in 2016, and then battled for 18 months to get a first contract. And at Cascadia

Behavioral Health, 270 mental health and addiction recovery workers at five outpatient clinics unionized last October and November despite an active anti-union campaign by management.

Oregon AFSCME appealed to county commissioners last summer for help, and found they were sympathetic.

"I don't think it's news to anybody that the workforce in both mental health and substance abuse is overworked and underpaid," said Renee Huizinga, policy director for Multnomah County Commissioner Sharon Meieran. "There are systemic things driving that, and one of those is the reimbursement rate."

Huizinga said increasing the rate at which providers are reimbursed for behavioral health services is a top state legislative priority for the county this year.

Meanwhile, a neutrality ordinance is on its way. Multnomah County spokesperson Julie Sullivan-Springhetti said it's taking longer than expected to develop because county managers are contending with leadership changes, a workplace investigation, and new computer software.



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