

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

# Kaiser Permanente in standoff with unions

Negotiations continue but without much progress as strike authorizations spread to four states.

By Don McIntosh

Leaders of Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP) report no significant improvements to Kaiser Permanente’s bargaining proposals since the unit of 3,400 members voted overwhelmingly in early October to authorize a strike. At press time, the two sides were still meeting to negotiate, and the union had not yet issued a 10-day strike notice as required for hospitals under federal law.

OFNHP is part of the Alliance of Health Care Unions (AHCU), a 50,000-member coalition of 21 unions at Kaiser. Four other AHCU unions in California and Hawaii totaling another 32,500 workers have also authorized a strike, and another 2,450 in Georgia are in the process of voting on strike authorization.

Bargaining has rarely been so contentious at Kaiser, which for decades touted itself as a union partner and model employer.

“This partnership is on the rocks,” said OFNHP bargaining



**NINE THOUSAND PAGES.** To illustrate the scale of nurse understaffing, OFNHP printed out every short staffing complaint that members have made since October 2018. Their point: Their contract’s nonbinding promises to improve staffing levels are no longer good enough.

team chair Joshua Holt, a staff nurse at Kaiser Westside Medical Center in Hillsboro.

In an open provocation to union members, Kaiser is pushing a “two-tier” scheme in which new hires would be paid as much as 25% less than current members. That’s considered a union-busting move because it would divide the workforce.

“This two tier proposal, in ad-

dition to being anti union, also exacerbates the staffing crisis,” Holt said. “What it does is make sure that we’re not going to be able to get applicants to fill jobs they’re going to post in the future.”

In addition, Kaiser is proposing wage increases of 1% a year at a moment when inflation is currently running 5.4%. OFNHP is proposing raises of 4% a year.

staffing since their current contract began Oct. 1, 2018.

Holt says members have made it clear that adequate staffing and patient care are their priorities, not money, and “patients not profits” is emerging as a key slogan of the deepening dispute.

“Everything about our proposal is about trying to improve the staffing conditions so that patients can get the care that they need,” Holt said. “That’s what this fight is about.”

Kaiser has 12 million health plan members and is technically a non-profit. But it has amassed reserves of \$44.5 billion, and reported a healthy \$2.7 billion in net revenue since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Meanwhile, in what may be more evidence of ethical rot among Kaiser executives, the U.S. Justice Department filed allegations in federal court Oct. 25 that Kaiser Permanente units in California and Colorado defrauded Medicare by about \$1 billion over a number of years — altering patient medical records to add diagnoses after the fact that either didn’t exist or were unrelated to patient visits, and billing Medicare for the fraudulent diagnoses.

## UNIONIZATION → SEP-OCT 2021

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 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	
<b>Providence Willamette Falls Med. Ctr.</b> (Oregon City) ONA	16-5	👍
▪ 30 registered nurses at an acute care hospital		
<b>Safeway</b> (Corvallis) Bakers Local 114	1-2	👎
▪ 3 production bakers, utility bakers, and cake decorators at 590 NE Circle Blvd.		
<b>Safeway</b> (Portland) Bakers Local 114	0-0	👎
▪ 2 cake decorators at 1100 NE Broadway St.		
<b>National Car Rental/Alamo</b> (Portland) Teamsters 305 <b>DECERT</b>	20-15	👍
▪ 41 rental agents, bus operators, maintenance techs at Portland airport		
<b>Tuality Healthcare</b> (Forest Grove) Oregon AFSCME	9-1	👍
▪ 16 medical assistants, receptionists, and health plan and panel coordinators		
<b>Mid-Columbia Medical Center</b> (The Dalles) OFNHP	45-4	👍
▪ 72 hospital techs		
<b>Wild Lilac</b> (Portland) ILWU Local 5	13-2	👍
▪ 21 workers at a daycare and preschool at 3829 SE 74th Ave.		

### Unionization by majority signup

Employer (Location) Union
<b>Port of Portland</b> (Portland) Port of Portland Police Employees Association
▪ 2 police lieutenants



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