Labor & Employment Law Daily Wrap Up, LABOR NEWS—Nurses at University of Illinois Health overwhelming approve new four-year contract, (Oct. 1, 2020)

Labor & Employment Law Daily Wrap Up

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By WK Editorial

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The Illinois Nurses Association (INA) announced on October 1, 2020, that union members who work at University of Illinois Health (UI Health) have voted 842 to 13 to approve a new four-year contract with the hospital. The nurses cast their votes on the new contract over a three-day period. The four-year deal was tentatively reached on September 24.

Pandemic fuels safety concerns. The contract approval follows 25 negotiating sessions and a seven-day strike that ended on September 19. Negotiations then continued, focusing on safe staffing, wages, and improved personal protection for nurses facing COVID-19, according to the union. Many of the nurses were affected by working on the front lines of the pandemic, which influenced their push for safer staffing in the hospital.

Key terms. The INA pointed to these highlights of the new four-year agreement:

- Guaranteed rolling-90-day supply of personal protective equipment;
- Universal N95 masking;
- Exploration of permanent respirators with replaceable filters;
- The redesign of the hospital’s airflow system;
- A new negative pressure wing of the hospital;
- The construction of new windows throughout the hospital that allow staff to turn any room into a negative pressure room with portable HEPA filters;
- Hazard pay for work during pandemics;
- A commitment to hiring at least 160 full-time nurses, creating natural nurse-to-patient ratios that improve core staffing, and quality of care for every patient that comes to UI Health;
- A commitment from UI Health to lobby the University for extended paid parental leave for all University employees; and
- Wage increases of 1.0, 1.50, 1.75, and 2.0 percent, respectively during the four-year contract.

"This contract is dedicated to the 1,400 nurses who came to work every day while they were exposed to COVID-19 without proper protection," said Doris Carroll, RN, INA President and UIH nurse. "The nurses were unified during the strike and stayed strong and committed during the negotiations. This contract represents a vast improvement compared to where we were before the strike, and we are happy to see that the hospital recognized the importance of supporting the nurses."

Companies: University of Illinois Health