Labor & Employment Law Daily Wrap Up, LABOR NEWS—Nurses union and University of Illinois Health reach tentative deal, (Sept. 24, 2020)

Labor & Employment Law Daily Wrap Up

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By Wayne D. Garris Jr, J.D.

As part the agreement, the hospital system will provide increased COVID-19 protections and hire more nurses.

On September 24, the Illinois Nurses Association announced that it has reached a tentative agreement with the University of Illinois Health after months of negotiations. According to the union, UI Health has agreed to several of the union’s demands, including:

- Guaranteed rolling-90-day supply of PPE
- Universal N95 masking
- Exploration of permanent respirators with replaceable filters
- 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 FTEs for nurses, creating natural nurse-to-patient ratios that improve core staffing and quality of care for every patient that comes to UI Health
- Fair wage increases
- A commitment from UI Health to lobby the University for extended paid parental leave for all University employees

Week-long strike. The agreement comes after a contentious work stoppage by the union. One day before the planned September 12 strike, a state court judge granted UI Health’s motion for a temporary restraining order preventing critical nurses from joining in the strike due to public safety issues. As a result, only 800 of the 1400 nurses in the union joined in the strike. However, two days later, approximately 4,000 UIH employees represented by SEIU went on strike. The nurses returned to work, without a contract, on September 21.

The agreement must still be ratified by the union members, and the vote will be held from September 28 to September 30. The INA will announce the results of the vote on Thursday October 1.

"We are gratified to achieve this hard-fought victory after months of negotiations—this 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 safe staffing," said INA President Doris Carroll, RN. "The nurses were unified and strong, and it paid off in what we think is a fair contract."

Companies: University of Illinois Health