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NURSES' CONTRACT EXPIRES AT U-M, NO AGREEMENT REACHED

Ann Arbor, MI – The union contract that covers the wages, benefits and working conditions for over 4,000 registered nurses at the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) will expire tonight at midnight with no agreement reached between the Employer and the University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC). UMPNC members are represented by the Michigan Nurses Association (MNA) for collective bargaining. The two parties have agreed to continue negotiations through next week with a deadline of Sunday, July 10 for a tentative agreement.

The negotiations are further complicated by the recent passing of legislation that strips away union protections that have been an essential part of past negotiations. Public Act 54 states that scheduled salary increases negotiated in the current contract are frozen until such time the contract is signed with no retroactive pay. "This new law means the union is put in the position of watching members' money go straight into the pockets of the Employer every single day that the contract is not signed," said John Karebian, MNA Executive Director. "This is a perfect example of how Governor Snyder's policies benefit the large corporations while robbing the workers of their union rights."

Earlier in the month MNA had proposed that UMHS and the nurses sign a 3-month contract which would give both parties more time to negotiate past the expiration date while protecting the nurses' rights under the current contract. UMHS turned down the proposal.

"Our patience will only go so far, said Karebian. "The longer the nurses go without a fair contract offer, the harder it will be to believe that UMHS is negotiating in good faith."

One of the unresolved issues is a significant cost increase in health insurance premiums proposed by UMHS. "Based on the Employer's proposals some of our nurses are projected to pay over \$8600/year for health insurance. This is not an economic necessity," said Jessica Salazar, MNA Labor Representative.

"UMHS has been involved with two massive building projects with the new Mott Children's Hospital and the Von Voigtlander Women's Hospital," said Salazar. "Perhaps taking on projects that will put them into the red by \$23.5 million in 2012 was more ambitious than UMHS should have taken on in a poor economy. Regardless, the bottom line is that these facilities are not going to be paid for on the backs of the nurses."

Both parties return to the bargaining table on Friday, July 1.

"It's time for this Employer to get serious about negotiating a fair contract," said Karebian. "People come from all over the world to receive nursing care at UMHS and they expect this institution to exhibit high standards of professionalism and dignity. Why should the nurses, who provide the care, expect anything different?"