

Backus Federation of Nurses

Local 5149, AFT CT, AFT, AFL-CIO



For Release: March 16, 2020

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Comments on Prioritizing Patient and Caregiver Safety at Backus Hospital During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Leaders of the Backus Federation of Nurses made the following public remarks regarding their request Friday to postpone negotiations and extend their current union contract:

“Our member nurses have always been committed to collaborating with hospital administrators when it comes to mutual goals,” said Backus Federation of Nurses President Sherri Dayton, RN. “During this public health emergency, our number one goal should be ensuring healthcare workers have the tools and resources to care for patients safely and effectively. That’s why we believe ongoing negotiations should be postponed and our current contract be extended,” added Dayton, a registered nurse in the emergency department (ED) at the Norwich acute care facility.

Union Vice President Jessica Harris, RN, said, “nurses were very excited to achieve safe staffing and improved working conditions in a new contract. But in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, our bargaining team decided that patient safety should be our shared priority. That’s why we proposed extending our existing contract and postponing talks,” added Harris, also a registered nurse in Backus Hospital’s ED.

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The Backus Federation of Nurses, AFT Local 5149, represents approximately 415 registered nurses at the Hartford HealthCare (HHC)-owned William W. Backus Hospital in Norwich and its partner medical facilities. The local union is a leading force for assuring quality, affordable care for their community and demanding a health system for the nation that puts patients before profits.

Attached -

Mar. 13 Memo to Backus Hospital Human Resources Director Pamela DeLise

TO: Pamela DeLise
FROM: Sherri Dayton & Jessica Harris
DATE: 3/13/2020
SUBJECT: Postponing Negotiations

Pam:

The nurses at Backus and their union are committed to collaborating with the hospital on how to best accomplish our mutual goal: ensuring healthcare workers have the tools and resources to care for patients safely and effectively during this public health emergency.

As you know, the current collective bargaining agreement is set to expire May 16, 2020. Nurses were very excited to achieve safe staffing and improved working conditions in a new contract. But in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the union's bargaining team decided that in the interest of patient safety, the parties should postpone negotiations and extend the existing contract.

The union therefore requests that the hospital agree to the following:

1. The parties will postpone negotiations and extend the current contract through June 30, 2020;
2. The parties will reassess the situation in thirty days to determine whether the pandemic necessitates an additional extension;
3. When bargaining commences, the negotiations will – consistent with past practice – be done at the hospital and open to any bargaining unit member who wishes to attend;
4. The hospital will continue to communicate and collaborate with the union to minimize the risks posed by COVID-19 to patients, nurses, and other healthcare workers.

Sherri Dayton, RN & Jessica Harris, RN
Backus Federation of Nurses, AFT Local 5149