

Workers Organize and Fight for Safety Amid COVID-19 Disaster

“Safe Jobs Save Lives” Campaign

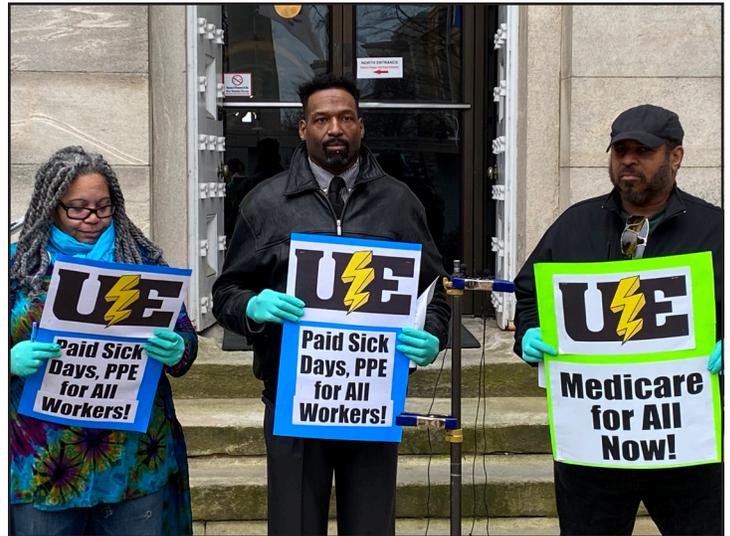
By Darrion Smith, Vice President, UE Eastern Region

Union holds press conference at Governor’s State Capitol office building

On March 10, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper declared a state of emergency for the state of North Carolina. On March 15, 2020 myself along with two other union members (**Nathanette Mayo** and **Angaza Laughinghouse**) were representatives of our union UE local 150 NCPSWU and held a statewide news conference covered by all the major TV stations. We introduced our UE local 150 demands to Governor Cooper on what workers needed to safely navigate through this crisis including expanded unemployment insurance, Medicare for All, universal paid sick days, PPE and hazard pay for essential workers and other demands.

Union begins meet-n-confer with DHHS Deputy Secretary Kinsley

This brought on a series of meetings between our UE local 150 DHHS Council and DHHS Deputy Secretary Kody Kinsley. During these meetings we went over our letter of demands and this henceforth started gradual positive changes for workers in DHHS policy. This also put some serious pressure on the NC Government as a whole to make some serious changes to keep ALL workers safe during this pandemic.



UE150 press conference at State Capitol building on March 15, 2020.

Management shows complete disrespect for our voices and safety

I am a Therapeutic Support Specialist in Central Regional Hospital in Butner, NC. We are part of the NC-DHHS System. My time here at Central Regional has been very stressful during the pandemic. When this pandemic first started workers were totally in the dark about what was happening and how we would move forward safely as a hospital. First of all, you have

(continued on page 8 under “CRH”)

In this Newsletter:

- ★ City workers fight for PPE and hazard pay
- ★ Healthcare workers defend NC against ReOpen NC right-wing protests
- ★ University Workers Organize for safety and more!

Charlotte City Workers Circulate Petition, Host Press Conference fighting for PPE staggered shifts and hazard pay

By Dominic Harris, President, Charlotte City workers chapter

At the beginning of the crisis every department was shot off PPE and the city had no answers. Their lack of response urged UE150 Charlotte city workers union into action. We called several emergency meetings to get the concerns of our members and nonmembers.

We took those concerns and developed a petition that could be signed electronically. That petition would then be sent to the emails of the mayor, city council members, and the city manager. Nearly 300 workers from Solid Waste, Aviation, Water, STS, CATS, LYNX light rail and CDOT signed the petition. We also participated in the April 3 sticker day.

The Executive board, Nichel Dunlap, Craig Brown, Kris Barrows, and Dominic Harris all called the elected officials in Charlotte and urged them to act in favor of city employees.

The demands included: Hazard Premium Pay, Paid leave for those effected by COVID-19, alternative shifts to reduce risk of spread, PPE, to sign a resolution in support of Medicare for all among others.

The majority of our demands were met although there were hiccups.

Then, suddenly on April 6, the Solid Waste department called an end to their alternative shift due to reasons unknown. When this happened, 4 of us showed up on the Monday that these workers were due to report to in and stood in solidarity before they clocked in and talked to every workers as they came in to work about the dangers they faced, including having over 200 workers grab the same door knob (without it being cleaned), go into same building and breath on each other possibly infecting each other.

The next day, Tuesday we called a press conference in front of Solid Waste that was covered by all of the local



Charlotte City Worker chapter officers, Dominic Harris, Craig Brown and Nichel Dunlap at Press Conference on April 7, 2020.



TV news outlets and forced Mayor Lyles to respond. We exposed that the City is sitting on \$116 million (or 16 % of their budget) in a reserve fund and claim they don't have money to pay workers during this crisis. Eventually they ended up voting to give us 5%, which is not enough.

The next step was and remains follow up to ensure that our members are taken care of as well as ensuring our employers do not forget that the city works because we do. We have also been following back up with the petition signers and have collected 12 new members.

Statewide Day of Action for Safe Jobs Save Lives

UE150 along with other unions in the Southern Workers Assembly have launched a Safe Jobs Save Lives campaign to defend workers, through aggressive collective struggle against the boss. On Friday, April 3, the day before the anniversary of assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 for standing with striking Memphis sanitation workers after the death of 2 workers. Over 1,000 workers across the state wore stickers at work to build visibility and unity at the workplace behind our campaigns for safety, PPE, and hazard pay.



Pictured above: D'Nard Wardlow, Darius Hagans and Kenny Alford in Charlotte Solid Waste. (Right) Charlotte Water



Pictured above: Union members in Charlotte Water. (Right) Phyllis Jones, YPEA, Murdoch Center in Butner, NC



Pictured above: Pam Rheurak and Rakesh Patel from CRH. Workers at NC Central University Dining



Pictured above: NCCU facilities workers, Larry Tucker . (Right) Healthcare Technicians from O'Berry Center with Sekia Royall.

Healthcare Workers Defend NC Against “ReOpen” right-wing protests



By Sarah Vukelich, Recording Sec., Durham chapter

Members of UE150 including **Sekia Royall** and **Kevin Yancey** supported and participated in the actions of Health Workers Defend NC, a group of health workers that formed to stand up to the right wing “re-open” protesters. The group of health workers came from across the state and included lab techs, CNAs, nutritional services workers, nurses, pharmacists, physicians assistants, and medical students.

We know that the “ReOpen” protests are funded by the corporate right (including the DeVos family and the Koch brothers), working closely with white supremacist organizations. It’s the group of forces that consolidated during the rise of the Tea Party. Now they are mobilizing their base to insist on re-opening, which will be a death sentence for many immunocompromised and elderly people, for Black and Brown people, for poor people, and for frontline workers. Across

the country, these protesters have been getting millions of dollars worth of media attention--an impact wildly disproportionate to their numbers. In North Carolina, health workers decided to interrupt that. Representing their patients, their co-workers hard at work in hospitals, and those who can’t take on the risk of counter-protesting, they stood stoically against the protesters, in formation six feet apart and wearing PPE in front of the State Legislature building in downtown Raleigh. They told their stories to the media. They are still reaching out across the state through their facebook group. Members of UE150 helped launch the facebook group and showed up to the front lines in Raleigh. In the second week, the health care workers began to speak about not only the importance of sticking to the governor’s plan about re-opening, but also about the importance of expanding social services on the state and federal level (for example, Medicare for All) so that people can stay home without facing a crisis.

Durham City COVID-19 report

The Durham City Workers Chapter circulated a petition early in the COVID-19 crisis and delivered a letter to the City Manager (same letter as the other municipal chapters, plus a demand that part-time workers be included in the COVID leave plan). Members from two departments, Fleet Maintenance and Cemeteries, participated in the statewide sticker-up day by wearing stickers on the job demanding “Safe Jobs Save Lives”. After delivering the letter, the City did move to skeleton crews, keeping workers in separate trucks and offering access to PPE and cleaning supplies. In some departments we are still having problems with insufficient PPE, workers being expected to do non-essential work like installing meters, cars not being aired out

before fleet maintenance workers get into them. Now, the City is amending the COVID leave policy. Emergency leave is no longer available, even though we are not through this crisis yet. Additionally, folks who are not essential workers, have not been offered a work-from-home situation, or have elected to take time off to care for children or other family members, are coming up on the end of their 5 week leave, and the City is not going to be extending it. Workers argue that for parents with children who are still out of daycare for an indefinite period of time there should be emergency leave aside from what was already given. Workers are concerned that the City will loosen restrictions and put multiple people in work trucks again. Though it hasn’t happened yet, we are on our guard.

COVID-19 HAZARD PAY FACTS:

FACT: Where workers organize and take collective action there is MUCH higher rates of hazard premium pay.

Below is a list of hazard pay for certain essential workers:

0% Most all facilities including hospitals with COVID-19 positive patients like UNCH, Rex, Wake Med and others that DO NOT HAVE A UNION CAMPAIGN

3-5% City workers in Cities where UE150 has organized and fought for hazard pay - City of Raleigh, City of Durham, City of Greensboro and City of Charlotte but does not include ANY others like Goldsboro, Rocky Mount, places with no union campaign.

25% DHHS state facilities pays 25% hazard premium pay for all employees in the building, including direct care, housekeeping, maintenance and food service staff, once there is a positive patients but NOT when employees test positive.

50% DHHS state employees directly on unit with positive patient

Note: DHHS Hazard pay was **won after the union circulated a petition and collected over 900 worker signatures** and had workers in several facilities confront the Director/CEO and deliver the letters. It was literally the day after letter deliveries that this new "Communicable disease policy came out, which explained the hazard premium pay.

50% The University of NC System housekeepers and maintenance workers after UE150's statewide UNC system petition

\$2/ hour premium - some grocery stores including Albertson's, Harris Teeter, King Kullen, Meijer, Randall's, Safeway, Shaw's, ShopRite, Stop&Shop, Von's, Whole Foods. Most of these are either unionized or the result of workers concerted activity.

UNC Chapter report:

UNC chapter has been working on a petition campaign to mobilize workers at UNC and spread awareness of the plight of all workers on our campus.

This included creating a letter and list of demands (which were submitted to the graduate school and the chancellors office at UNC) alongside a petition campaign with testimonials. This also included supporting

the wider campus worker list of demands.

One of our members wrote an Opt-Ed that was published in the DTH, regarding the list of demands and the way the university has failed to support graduate and campus workers during this crisis. We are still working on advocating for graduate campus workers while also organizing in targeted departments for recruitment during this period.

Goldsboro city workers & supporters rally crowd into admin building, demanding PPE, & hazard pay amid COVID-19

On Tuesday, May 12, over 30 employees of the City of Goldsboro Public Works department, public sector union members, their community allies and three City Council members rallied at City Hall for proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), hazard pay, staggered shifts and other safety measures to protect them from harms of COVID-19.

Workers have been raising their concerns with management and the city administration since late March. After not hearing sufficient response, workers took their concerns directly to **City Manager Tim Salmon**. After crowding into the lobby of the city administration building, beside City Hall, and waiting about 15 minutes, and urged by **Council members Taj Pollack, Antonio Williams, and Brandi Matthews**, Salmon did finally come down stairs to greet the crowd.



PHOTO: May 12, UE union members and community supporters rally with city employees at City Hall to support their demands for PPE and hazard pay.

Looking disturbed, Salmon hastily took the letter, signed by employees and their allies, from **Bryce Carter**, a streets department worker with the City of Greensboro, and President of the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union, UE Local 150. Carter and other union members, including **Vice President Sekia Royall**, Food Service Assistant at O'Berry Neuro-Medical Treatment Center in Goldsboro, attended the rally to support the city workers campaign for "Safe Jobs Save Lives" and to support their rights to unionize.

After receiving the letter, Salmon dismissed the crowd telling them there was no appointment and attempted to dodge questions from the media. It was clear he had no substantial concern for city employees safety.

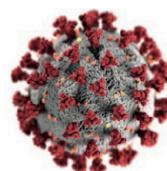
Earlier, on April 7, sixteen workers in the Public Works department wore stickers saying "Safe Jobs Save Lives" to work and signed a letter, along with thirty community supporters, addressed to City Manager Tim Salmon. To this date, there has been no official response, other than management attempting to

intimidate city workers for exercising their constitutional rights.

Workers delivered a follow-up letter on April 21 to Public Works Director Rick Fletcher, outlining their concerns for safety, and the violations of their constitutional rights to freedom of association, including joining a union.

SAFE JOBS

SAVE LIVES



#OrganizetheSouth
#COVID19

“Other essential businesses have provided PPE and hazardous pay, I would like the City of Goldsboro take the lead on this matter,” stated **Anya “AJ” Dawson**, Operator 4 in the Public Works department, in front of the May 4 City Council meeting. Dawson continued, “We come in contact with blood born pathogens and leachate on a daily basis, along with animal and human feces. We inhale fumes and come in contact with things that could expose us to COVID-19. We deserve these basic protections.”

Essential city workers in many municipalities across the state have demanded and received, minimally PPE and hazard pay. Municipal chapters of UE Local 150 union in Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh and Greensboro have received that in addition to extra cleaning supplies, staggered shifts, hazard pay and smaller crew sizes to help with social distancing.

“As a state worker I understand the burden and privilege to be called an essential worker in this time,” stated Sekia Royall, Vice President of North Carolina Public Service Workers Union, UE Local 150, a Food Service Assistant at O’Berry Neuro-Medical Treatment Center and Goldsboro resident. “We are



PHOTO: UE150 President Bryce Carter delivers letter signed by city workers and community allies to Goldsboro City Manager Tim Salmon.

fully behind the city workers demands for more PPE and hazard pay.”

City of Goldsboro workers are continuing to build their organizing committee so they can stand together and win the much deserved safety, rights and raises, and even save lives.

Statewide Sticker Day -- Safe Jobs Save Lives

On April 3, Goldsboro City Workers wore stickers to work as part of the statewide Union day of action Safe Jobs Save Lives campaign.

These recent actions by City Workers have been a big step forward for us building our workers’ organization.

- 1) Signed two petitions and letters demanding safety, PPE and hazard pay and for our Constitutional rights.
- 2) Wore stickers at work
- 3) Spoke at May 4 City Council meeting
- 4) May 12 Press conference and letter delivery to City Manager.

Let’s keep organizing!!



Murdoch Center employees speak-out for hazard pay & deliver hundreds of petitions

Wednesday May 20, essential health care workers at Murdoch Developmental Center residential facility spoke out and delivered petitions amid coronavirus.

In early April, over 900 workers at N.C. Department of Health and Human Services state operated facilities, like Murdoch Center, signed a petition calling for hazard pay due to the risks they take to come to work. At least one employee and two residents at the facility have tested positive for the virus this week, yet workers are still not receiving hazard pay. Union members gathered in a rally then marched to deliver a second petition to facility director Pam Kuhno. This is part of a statewide Safe Jobs Save Lives campaign organized by the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union, UE Local 150.

“Even Target and Amazon workers are getting ‘hero’ pay. We deserve to get it RIGHT NOW! Everyone I know working in grocery stores, BJ’s, Walmart are



receiving extra compensation for being essential workers. Why can't we get it?," stated union member Janet Silver, Youth Program Education Assistant at Murdoch Center. Silver continued, "those businesses are shutting down early. We don't get to shut down early. We are bringing the virus home to our family. Not only are we health care workers, we are working with people with behavior issues. We are wearing masks, stressed out, and dealing with these behaviors. We should have gotten hazard pay first!"

CRH (continued from cover)

people in offices making decisions about people who are on the front line. This is a major problem. We as workers feel very disrespected and this gives us the impression that the upper management sees our lives as expendable.

Union circulates petition, collects 900 worker signatures, immediate results

It is a shame that workers have to fight for Hazard pay, additional sick leave, child care and other basic human needs when you have a world wide crisis. Our union initiated petitions within DHHS facilities to demand hazard pay. We collected over 900 signatures from DHHS workers, and organized delegations to deliver those petitions with signatures to facility directors, including CRH CEO Robyn Carr on April 15. The day after we delivered our petition, management sent out a memo to all workers outlining their plan to pay workers for hazard pay. Previously there had been no plan.

The struggle continues

The sad part about this is that many workers had to miss work and stay home because these basic needs were not accounted for and suffered major financial deficit. The hospital made several mistakes such as: Not listening to one of the medical doctors as they asked the facility to test patients before they received them. This accounted for our first case of Covid-19. This caused exposure to staff and patients and also quarantined a whole unit. This is why we as workers do not respect the decisions of upper management. We are expected to come to work everyday and fight this pandemic and keep our clients safe, but no one is looking out for us workers, except ourselves organized as a union. We still have not received the hazard pay on our checks (Management says that April and May will be on the May check. We will see).

With the positive patients in the facility, we have seen some new concerns. On May 1, May Day, International Workers Day, we began circulating a 2nd petition calling for testing of all staff and patients and that all staff get paid time and half hazard pay, given the exposure we all face. We collected over 170 signatures on this petition and a group of workers again delivered to the CEO on May 13 and requested a meeting with her.