



UNION NEWS!

Newsletter of the Department of Health and Human Services Division of UE Local 150

<http://UE150.org>

DHHS Workers Sign Mass Petition Demanding Hazard Pay, HEPA filters and Safety amid COVID

UE150 Union leaders Meet twice with DHHS Administration

In January 2021, over 700 DHHS workers signed petitions demanding:

1. Continued hazard premium payments beyond January 31 until all COVID + residents and workers have fully recovered.
2. Install HEPA filtration systems inside every indoor space within DHHS DSOHF facilities to clean the air of virus particles, and
3. Expedite the hiring process to allow new hires to fill the many vacant positions.
4. DHHS should supply all staff with N-95 masks.
5. End the cross-contamination due to transferring staff from COVID-19+ areas back to other areas without proper quarantine period and test results.

UE150 DHHS Council delivered this petition on January 10 to DHHS Administration in Raleigh. In response, union leaders met with Karen Burkes (DSOFH Interim Director), Dr. Carrie Brown (Chief Medical Officer) and Jonathan Kappler (Assistant to the Deputy Secretary) on January 25 and a follow up meeting on March 12.

During both of these meetings, we had lots of important discussion, but on neither meeting did we get a positive response about hazard pay. They claimed it was out of their hands and did not appear to be advocating for further hazard premium payments.

In order to win further hazard premium payments, DHHS workers must consider more bold mass collective action. Meetings alone will not be enough.



UE150 Rally at Murdoch Center demanding hazard pay and better PPE.

However, during these meetings, the Union was able to **win changes in policy that now allow for voluntary use of N95 masks**, an issue we had filed a complaint with OSHA around last Spring. We also secured the following commitments from DHHS:

1. In order to address the on-going chronic staff shortages that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, we are requesting information on staffing ratios, specifically vacancy rate and turn-over rates for all direct care staff.

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- ★ Upcoming Union Trainings
- ★ Union Meets w/ New NC Department of Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson demanding better enforcement of safety on the job!

DHHS Workers fight for Hazard Pay and Safety

(continued from page 1, commitments from DHHS):

2. Consideration of a centralized staffing system proposed by UE150 leaders at CRH to help alleviate stress due to forced overtime/red dot usage.

3. Request plans for use of the funds from COVID-19 Stimulus package American Recovery Plan passed in US Congress in late March, including total amounts allocated to the state, DHHS, and DSOHF, respectively.

4. Request any proposals that DSOHF is making to DHHS and Governor Cooper regarding the proposed FY2022 State Budget.

5. Follow-up from Karen Burkes about setting up meetings between staff and medical doctors at all facilities to allow further Q&A sessions for those that have not yet been vaccinated.

6. Request information about proposed use of Johnson and Johnson vaccine for DSOHF employees.

7. Karen Burke pledged to send us regular updates about status of ordering HEPA filters, and current plans for where they will be installed, and specific timeframe for installation.

8. Karen Burke pledged to look into increasing supplies of sanitizing hand wipes, and disinfectant spray to ensure all units have adequate supply and do not run out.

UE150 DHHS Council has another meeting with DHI-IS, this time with Kody Kinsley, Deputy Secretary, on April 7 to further discuss these needed changes and get a progress report.

Union Fights Unjust Termination, Eddie Vaughn Now before the Office of Administrative Hearings

Eddie Vaughn was terminated from Murdoch Center after having allegedly abused a resident by leaving his door open at night. The core question for justice here is: 1) If Eddie had a clean disciplinary record, was this enough to automatically terminate him? and 2) There was never any training or any specific policy that stated that leaving the door open was emotional abuse.

It is common practice, as the union has proven through testimony of other staff and in my witness statements, to leave the door open while individuals sleep. The individual never asked Eddie to close his door. Management has no proof of anything otherwise, and instead resorted to false allegations against Eddie, regarding other abuse charges, which their own investigation never substantiated, yet they chose to leave it in his dismissal letter as if to tarnish his character to justify his termination.

State employees are covered by “Just Cause” which means that we are not “At-will” employees. You cannot be disciplined unless the boss meets the “**7 standards of Just Cause**” which include:

- 1) Fair Notice
- 2) Prior Enforcement
- 3) Due Process
- 4) Substantial Evidence
- 5) Equal Treatment
- 6) Progressive Discipline, and
- 7) Mitigating and Extenuating Circumstances.



DHHS did not give fair notice because there was no written work rule about leaving doors open at night. There was not prior enforcement because no other workers have been terminated, as far as the union investigations show. They did not follow Progressive Discipline because Eddie had a clean disciplinary record and they went directly to termination. Lastly, they did not consider the mitigating and extenuating circumstances that the kid could elope and that there were no supervisors around to ask permission.

The union retained the law services of Trish Pande who will be representing Eddie in front of the OAH.



UE Leadership Steward Training Certification Program!

UE union is now offering FREE trainings every month! All trainings are VIA ZOOM. If workers complete 3 trainings you will receive a Leadership Certificate.

Two workshop opportunities to build member skills and union power.
Each workshop will have two opportunities for members to attend.

Fighting on the Inside:
Building a Campaign
to Win

Tuesday, April 13
Noon OR 6 pm

Bringing New Members
into the Union
(Internal Organizing)

Saturday,
May 22 - 10 am
OR Sunday,
May 23 - 4 pm

WE ARE THE UNION



We Make a Difference

Register today online here:
bit.ly/UE150Trainings

Union Leaders meet with New NC Department of Labor Commissioner, Dobson and push for more enforcement of Safety violations

On January 29th, UE150 President Sekia Royall, along with leaders from dozens of other unions and worker organizations across the state, met with the newly-elected NC Department of Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson. We discussed a report drafted by many labor groups which included many recommendations for the NC Department of Labor to consider:

1. Rebuild the Department's capacity with adequate staffing and funding; training and new complaint systems; and enhanced transparency.
2. Protect worker health and safety during the pandemic and beyond by acting quickly to adopt a COVID-19 emergency temporary standard (ETS), followed by a permanent infectious disease standard, and an ergonomics standard; investigating existing COVID-19 complaints and setting priorities for investigations; improving education of employers and employees; and boosting penalties.
3. Crack down on wage theft and misclassification by updating guidance and regulations; developing a strategic enforcement plan.
4. Strengthen protections for North Carolina workers under the Retaliatory Employment Discrimination Act (REDA) by launching an enforcement and public education initiative; extending the deadline for complaints; clarifying protection against immigration-based retaliation;



Pictured above: Workers and union leaders from across the state on a zoom meeting with NCDOL Commissioner Labor Commissioner Josh Dobson.

5. Protect workers' right to organize by updating NCDOL's workplace rights notice, and supporting legislation to authorize public sector collective bargaining and the repeal of right-to-work.
6. Protect migrant workers by improving enforcement of migrant housing standards and supporting strengthened standards for immediate emergency COVID-19 safety standard, protecting workers rights to organize including public sector collective bargaining, strengthening enforcement anti-retaliation protections of NCDOL.

Contact UE150 DHHS Council Leaders

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