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Why nurses at Seattle Children’s Hospital are preparing to strike

for the first time in the hospital’s 118-year history

Industry leader with sub-market pay

Seattle Children’s is ranked among the Top 10 Pediatric Hospitals nationally, tied for #1 in the Pacific Region, and #1 in the Pacific Northwest.¹ Children’s is a level 1 pediatric trauma rehabilitation center, and its nurses provide life-saving care in specialized intensive care units that set Seattle Children’s Hospital apart from local area hospitals. Nurses help keep Seattle Children’s ranked among the top nationally in disciplines of diabetes and endocrinology, neonatology, nephrology, neurology and neurosurgery, pulmonology, and urology.

Why then does Seattle Children’s insist on keeping nurse pay far below West Coast pediatric hospitals that do not provide the same specialized care? Seattle Children’s **can** do better. It **must** do better.

Making assault victims pay

In the last year, there were 596 reported workplace violence events at Seattle Children’s, with over 70% of those occurring in our Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit (PBMU).² Nurses have been bitten, beaten, concussed, and sexually assaulted at work.

Currently, injured nurses must use their own sick leave to recover – if they have no sick leave left, they face disciplinary action if they stay home to heal. According to hospital data, for PBMU nurses, where violence is most prevalent, 67% have less than one shift of paid time off available and 81% have less than two shifts. Hospital-wide, 51% of nurses don’t have enough sick time to wait out the flu, COVID, or even the common cold.

We have proposed sick leave increases to protect victims of workplace violence and allow sick nurses to stay home to protect their vulnerable patients. The hospital has refused to meet our asks. This is unconscionable.

Attacking union strength

For decades, the Washington State Nurses Association and Seattle Children’s built our labor-management relationship on mutual respect, which directly supported patient safety and staff well-being. In these negotiations, the hospital attacked that partnership, proposing to eliminate union security and dues deduction, have the union waive nurses’ rights to meal breaks by contract, and force nurses into mandatory individual arbitration when Seattle Children’s violates the law, risking both staff stability and quality care.

This 180-degree turn threatens the collaborative relationship that made Seattle Children’s exceptional.

A safe, healthy workplace

We don’t want a labor dispute. We don’t want to strike. We want a fair contract that protects nurses’ legal rights, ensures patient safety, compensates nurses injured by workplace violence, and maintains the union strength that has made this institution exceptional.

On Oct. 31, 2025, we asked the Board of Trustees at Seattle Children’s: stop the attacks on nurses’ rights and restore the hospital’s values. More bargaining days have come and gone, and our contract extensions have expired. The nurses at Seattle Children’s, however, continue to show up around the clock, using their specialized skills and abilities to care for our region’s sickest children.

Seattle Children’s has told its nurses it’s not that they can’t afford our proposals, it’s that they find us unreasonable. We disagree. We believe:

- Nurses assaulted at work shouldn’t have to pay for their own recovery.
- Nurses without sick leave face an unfair choice: come to work contagious or face discipline.
- Life events like childbirth and cancer shouldn’t result in a loss of their health insurance.
- Nurses should be able to afford to live where they work and raise families, if they choose.
- Wages for nurses should reflect competitively to the market for pediatric specialty care.
- The hospital should incentivize experienced nurses to stay in hard-to-fill roles like night shift and behavioral safety trained positions to protect nurse and patient safety.
- Mandatory arbitration and class action waivers strip nurses of their ability to hold the hospital accountable in court if/when the hospital breaks the law.

We are asking our community to raise their voices in support of the nurses who care for your kids. If you agree, email your words of support to our CEO, Jeff Sperring, MD (jeff.sperring@seattlechildrens.org) before he retires in January and leaves our community to pick up the pieces of this avoidable mess.

The WSNA-Seattle Children’s Bargaining Team represents over 2,100 registered nurses at Seattle Children’s Hospital.

¹ U.S. News and World Report, Best Children’s Hospitals 2025-26. Retrieved 11-25-25 <https://health.usnews.com/health-news/best-childrens-hospitals/articles/best-childrens-hospitals-honor-roll-and-overview>
² internal data from Seattle Children’s Hospital obtained via WSNA’s request for information during the negotiation process.