



**Press Conference**

**9:00 a.m., June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023**

**Prepared Remarks on ONA Represented Nurses Giving 10-Day Notice of Strike at St. Charles Medical Center Bend**

Speakers:

- Tamie Cline, RN, President of the Board, Oregon Nurses Association
- Erin Harrington, RN, Chair, St. Charles Medical Center Bend Bargaining Unit Executive Committee
- Heather Bristol, RN, Union Steward and PNCC member, St. Charles Medical Center
- Jonathon Baker, President, Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals
- State Representative Jason Kropf, District 54- Bend

<p>9:00am: Press Conference Begins</p>	<p><b>Tamie Cline, ONA President:</b></p> <p>Good morning. Thank you for joining us today, both in person and virtually, for this important announcement regarding the ongoing contract negotiations between Oregon Nurses Association-represented nurses and St. Charles Medical Center in Bend.</p> <p>My name is Tamie Cline and I have the great honor of serving the more 16,000 nurses and allied health care workers as the President of the Oregon Nurses Association. My role today is to provide introduce the various speakers who will make remarks and, once prepared remarks are finished, help answer questions from the press.</p> <p>But before I introduce our speakers, I want to take a moment to address something the public may have heard from St. Charles spokespeople in the past few weeks.</p> <p>St. Charles has said, in email communications to their staff and in press releases, that the threat of strike action is a common ploy used by nurses to advance contract negotiations.</p>
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	<p>As the President of the Oregon Nurses Association, I want to tell the people of Central Oregon that this is simply not true.</p> <p>A strike is a very, very serious action, and it is one that ONA, and the nurses here at St. Charles, would never take lightly.</p> <p>After talking with the dedicated nurses here at St. Charles, I can tell you, with 100% certainty, that there is not a single nurse at St. Charles that WANTS to go out on strike. Every single nurse at St. Charles wants to be at the bedside, providing world class health care to their neighbors, family members and friends.</p> <p>It is my pleasure, now, to introduce Erin Harrington, RN, Chair of the St. Charles Medical Center Bend Bargaining Unit Executive Committee. Erin?</p>
9:05am	<p><b>Erin Harrington, RN:</b></p> <p>Thank you, Tamie.</p> <p>Last night, Thursday June 1<sup>st</sup>, at approximately 4:30pm, a 10-day notice of the nurses’ intent to strike was both hand-delivered and emailed to representatives of St. Charles Medical Center Bend management. We have fulfilled our legal requirements to notify the hospital that nurses will be on strike beginning at 7:00am on Monday June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023.</p> <p>What, exactly, does that mean for our community?</p> <p>First, we have provided a 10-day notice to give enough time for the hospital to transfer patients and make decisions about what services they will continue to provide. It is important for you to know that St. Charles has a duty to provide adequate care to this community, and because they need to meet that need, St. Charles should seek to settle this contract as soon as possible.</p>

Second, at 7am on June 12<sup>th</sup>, if we do not reach a fair contract before that time, nurses will hand over care of their patients to whomever St. Charles has arranged to provide care and nurses will leave the hospital. We expect those nurses will join their colleagues on the picket line.

Third, it is important for everyone to know that we are engaged in every effort to reach a fair agreement, and that includes having a federal mediator attend upcoming negotiations on June 6 and 7. Nurses have bargained in good faith, and we need St. Charles to do the same in hope of getting a fair contract before June 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 am.

As Tamie mentioned, none of us want to strike. But the nurses at St. Charles believe that taking this action is the only way for our concerns to be heard, taken seriously and addressed by St. Charles management. The people of Bend, and our community across Central Oregon, know that nurses at St. Charles have been subjected to extremely difficult working conditions, failures of leadership, and unfair labor practices, for years.

I am sure people will remember the ongoing unsafe staffing complaints, failures to provide replacement staff for understaffed units, historic failures to ensure staff get their legally required rest and meal breaks, multiple citations from the Oregon Health Authority for repeated non-compliance with Oregon's hospital staffing law, months and months of chaos related to a ransomware attack on the hospital's payroll system, unprecedented turnover of nursing staff over the past few years, and truly worrying turnover of leadership at the executive level – to name just a few of the many crises St. Charles has faced over the past few years.

It should come as no surprise to this community, then, that in spite of the years of work nurses have put into trying to improve working conditions, and the common-sense proposals we have made at the negotiating table, St. Charles has simply failed to do the right thing.

We have done everything we can, short of going on strike, and now, St. Charles has forced our hand. It remains our hope that we will get a fair contract. We want to get a fair contract. We do not want to go on strike, but we will not accept a bad deal that simply allows St. Charles to continue the dangerous and unsustainable status quo. And that is why we have announced this 10-day notice, and why we are preparing to go on strike beginning June 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00am.

Now, I would like to introduce one of my frontline nursing colleagues who will tell you more about why nurses have made this extremely difficult decision to strike, Heather Bristol.

Heather?

9:10am

**Heather Bristol, RN**

Thank you, Erin.

Good morning. My name is Heather Bristol and I have been a nurse for 22 years and have specialized in neonatal intensive care for 20 years.

I am here this morning to share, with our community, why the nurses at St Charles Bend have called a strike.

I think we can all agree after 3 years of a pandemic that healthcare in America and in Central Oregon is broken. The conditions nurses are being forced to work under at St Charles is putting both patients and nurses at risk and not providing the community with the care they deserve. Nursing units throughout the hospital are working short staffed with nurses taking on patients loads outside of safe staffing ratios and national standards. Nurses are working without lunches and breaks and working thousands of hours of overtime to compensate for the staffing crisis at St Charles.

Instead of meeting the nurses at the table to work together to solve this problem, St Charles Administration is blocking open beds, cancelling surgeries, and boarding patients in the emergency room. Because of this, the nurses at St Charles are being forced to act, not only to protect ourselves and our patients, but our entire community.

We asked St. Charles to put safe staffing standards to protect patients and support quality care into our contract. They said no.

We asked St. Charles to help the nurses who provide health care get more affordable health insurance. They said no.

We asked St. Charles to give us assurances that, if St. Charles sells the hospital to some other health system, we could keep our jobs. They said no.

We asked for reasonable, competitive pay – pay that will enable nurses to afford to live in this community while caring for the members of this community, and a salary that will help recruit nurses to the hospital. They said no.

St. Charles said no.

Choosing to stand outside the hospital on strike instead of at the bedside of our patients is not our first choice, but it is the only choice St Charles Administration has left us with.

This strike is our way of calling on St Charles to come back to the table with something other than No, No, No. We want real, meaningful proposals that will help recruit nurses to work here and help retain the nurses who already work here.

That is the only way to safely care for our community. That is what the nurses want, and we know that is what the community wants, too.

	<p>If we allow St. Charles to ignore us, to dismiss our concerns and simply carry on as if nothing was wrong... well, the truth is that would be so much worse for our community in the long run.</p> <p>The nurses of St. Charles are doing what we must to protect you, our community, and ourselves. We hope you will stand with us for the health of our community. You can learn more about how to help nurses during the upcoming strike by visiting <a href="http://RespectOurNurses.com">Respect Our Nurses dot com</a>.</p> <p>Thank you. I would now like to introduce Jonathon Baker, President of the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, our sister union that represents a range of allied health professionals and technologists at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend.</p> <p>Jonathon?</p>
9:15am	<p><b>Jonathon Baker, OFNHP President</b></p> <p>I want to thank everyone who has come out today and thank my colleagues at the Oregon Nurses Association for letting me join them.</p> <p>My name is Jonathon Baker and I am the President of the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, a proud affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, Nurses and Health Professionals. We represent nearly 6,000 RNs and healthcare professionals in Oregon and Southwest Washington at healthcare systems like Kaiser, PeaceHealth, and, here, at St. Charles.</p> <p>As many of you may remember, we were in an eerily similar situation in 2021. We represent what are called “technologists,” which includes a huge range of skilled healthcare professions such as respiratory therapists, surgical techs, and more, all of which are essential to providing our community with excellent care.</p>

These techs were fighting for living wages, many of whom were vastly underpaid for the rapidly rising costs of living near Bend. Instead of simply agreeing to common sense wage and benefit adjustments, St. Charles was willing to risk the entire care system by forcing us to strike. It took a 9-day strike, the support of almost every major elected official in the state, civic, faith, and activist leaders raising their voices, and other allies and unions standing in solidarity with us before St. Charles finally listened and agreed to a fair contract.

One of those unions that stood with us are the RNs with the Oregon Nurses Association, and we intend to stand with them as well. It shouldn't take a strike for healthcare professionals to get the resources they need to have a meaningful life. It shouldn't require us *walking out* to get the support we need to care for our patients. But when making money takes precedence over patient care and supporting your staff, then I suppose they are simply making choices to line the pockets of their executives.

The RNs represented by ONA are the ones that actually *do* the patient care, not the high paid executives who are refusing to agree to a fair contract. Along with the techs we represent, the RNs are who is keeping Central Oregon healthy day in and day out. We, together, are who carried this community through the pandemic, who come into work each morning prepared to do what it takes to save lives. All of us would prefer to remain on the hospital floor providing for patients, but if management is committed to making profits on the backs of healthcare workers and understaffing the hospital so profoundly that it puts our community's public health in jeopardy, then we will all have to do what's necessary to restore equity and justice.

These RNs are the ones who are looking out for patients, and their campaign is not simply about workplace conditions and wages, but about the patients themselves. Low wages ensure that understaffing continues, which guarantees long wait times and has dire healthcare ramifications.

	<p>People’s lives are at stake in this fight. Which is why when ONA walks out on strike in ten days, they do so with the entire community beside them. This fight belongs to all of us because they are, quite literally, fighting for every patient.</p> <p>Only by acting as a unified community can we push St. Charles to do what is right for healthcare professionals and our patients. We saw in 2021 what it takes to win justice and improve our care system, and our community will do what it takes to ensure that St. Charles hears the message we are sending.</p> <p>So the question I have to the executives who are watching this press conference from a distance is: can you hear us now?</p> <p>Now I would like to invite Representative Jason Kropf to deliver a few remarks. Representative?</p>
9:20am	<p>Rep. Jason Kropf</p> <p>Good afternoon, I am Jason Kropf, State Representative for House District 54. My district includes St Charles Bend, and many of my constituents work at the hospital and, of course, are also patients there.</p> <p>In February of this year, I sat down with over two dozen nurses who work at St Charles. Their dedication and passion for serving our community was clear. It was also clear that their working conditions were unsustainable. They shared with me the daily struggle to provide quality care in the face of understaffing, and I am saddened to be here months later knowing that their situation has not improved.</p> <p>Our nurses serve on the frontlines of our healthcare system. They pour their hearts and souls into caring for us. Now it’s our time to show we care for them.</p>



I am proud to stand with ONA nurses as they fight for a fair contract agreement that will help recruit and retain the nurses our community desperately needs and improve working conditions at the hospital.

St Charles nurses have demonstrated time and again their commitment to their work and their patients. What these nurses want is a fair contract, not a strike.

Preparing for a strike is not an action to be taken lightly, and I know our nurses are only willing to take this step-in order to not settle for a bad contract that continues the status quo and endangers the health of our community.

To be clear, the status quo is unacceptable. Federal unfair labor practice act complaints, state staffing law complaints, and OSHA violations all underscore that St Charles must do better.

I am urging St Charles executives to reach a fair contract that empowers our nurses to safely and effectively return to work. Our community deserves quality healthcare, and our nurses deserve the support to provide it.

For community members who share my desire to reach a fair contract, I urge you to visit [Respect Our Nurses dot com](http://RespectOurNurses.com) – again that's [Respect Our Nurses dot com](http://RespectOurNurses.com) – and sign the community petition. Reach out to St Charles, and let them know you want a fair contract, and show our nurses, in any way you can, just how much we respect their dedication to serving our community to the fullest. Together, we can encourage St Charles to come to the table with a fair contract.

Thank you.

<p>9:25am</p>	<p><b>Tamie Cline, ONA President</b></p> <p>Thank you to all of our speakers, for your time today. To the nurses at St. Charles, I know I speak for every member of the Oregon Nurses Association across the state when I say we are standing with you, in solidarity, for the benefit of our patients and your community.</p> <p>We will now open the floor to questions for our nurse leaders from the press for 15 minutes.</p>
<p>9:30am – 9:45am Press Questions</p>	<p><b>Tamie Cline, ONA President</b></p> <p><b><i>Q&amp;A ENDS</i></b></p> <p>Thank you all for your time. We will end the press conference now. Our communications staff will be sending out a press release shortly, including a copy of today’s prepared remarks. If members of the press who are in attendance in person wish to speak with a nurse leader, please speak with Scott Palmer, who will assist in setting you up for an interview.</p> <p>You can also learn more about how to support the nurses of St. Charles at <a href="http://RespectOurNurses.com">Respect Our Nurses dot com</a>.</p>