

Nurses deserve better from Maine Med

The unannounced removal of certain forms of paid leave is discouraging for a union willing to bargain in good faith.

— Special to the Telegram

Maine Medical Center President Jeff Sanders recently published a commentary in these pages concerning non-medical patients being housed within acute care hospitals like ours (“Failure to invest in residential facilities leaves Mainers with nowhere to go,” Jan. 15).

President Sanders is right that boarding people in our Emergency Department and elsewhere does a disservice to people who have nowhere else to go. We need support from our state Legislature and executive branch to help hospitals support people who come to us as a last resort, through no fault of their own.

But while Sanders is making appeals to community and state leaders about this matter, he is choosing to avoid a different one, a problem within his control.

This is an immediate and urgent situation for thousands of his employees, a situation that was created under his leadership.

On Dec. 11, barely two months after we ratified our first union contract, Maine Medical Center rescinded our paid parental, bereavement, jury duty and military service leave. This means that nurses will now lose paid time off they need and deserve as new parents, while grieving the loss of loved ones, to serve as jurors or to serve our country in military service.

We were given no official notice of the sudden end of these benefits.

Maine Med never contacted our union or offered to bargain with us on this, and we still do not have a satisfactory reason for the decision. We first found out about this change through an email that was leaked to us.

But now, Maine Med has told us that it wants to “negotiate” the restoration of these benefits.

Initially, Maine Med told us it wanted to change some of the agreed-upon contract language that we finalized back in September.

We’re concerned that management is trying to gain unfair leverage over us by taking these benefits away.

We formed our union precisely to protect nurses and our patients from this sort of unilateral decision-making by management. Until now, we were hopeful that our work with our employer was productive in helping us improve patient care and working conditions for everyone at Maine Med.

As Maine Med buys up the neighborhood around its Bramhall campus and expands its physical footprint in our increasingly crowded city, it should lead by example in our community, especially when it comes to the treatment of caregivers like us, who risked our lives to keep people safe and well during the pandemic.

Instead, as President Sanders claims to advocate for our patients, his management team is trying to scheme its way around working with the people who work with and advocate for our patients every day.

We are always willing to sit down and discuss issues that concern our employer. But we will not be bullied by management that unilaterally decided to restrict our paid leave.

Employers should treat all employees fairly and with dignity and respect. This is one problem that Sanders and Maine Medical Center can and must fix today.