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## Maine Med restores paid leave for union nurses

By **TIM CEBULA** Staff Writer

Maine Medical Center restored a variety of paid leave benefits to union nurses at the state's largest hospital Friday and agreed to additional perks for the group, ending a two-month contract battle.

The amendments to the collective bargaining agreement include adding back paid parental, bereavement, jury duty, witness and military leaves, all of which had been cut from the nurses' contract last December. Maine Medical Center spokespeople said at the time that the hospital was free to make the cuts because paid leave for those reasons wasn't explicitly discussed during contract negotiations.

Paid leave benefits will be retroactive to December 2022 so nurses who previously used personal time off or went unpaid to cover their leaves will be reimbursed or have their personal time restored, according to Maine Medical Center.

"We are pleased to reach this agreement with union representatives to amend our contract," said Maine Medical Center Chief Nursing Officer Devin Carr. The revised agreement also calls for making official some additional pay practices for specific nursing roles – salaried nurses who pick up extra shifts in their departments will now earn time-and-a-half, for instance – and adds some specific scheduling perks for nurses with seniority.

"We are absolutely thrilled to have back our paid leave that we were always entitled to keeping, but that the hospital chose to take away from us," said Mary Kate O'Sullivan, a registered nurse, Maine State Nurses' Association union steward and member of the collective bargaining team. "We finally won it back without making any concessions.

"We're not going to forget the things that management does to us, but I think now they realize when they take things away from us, we're not going to stop fighting until we get them back," O'Sullivan added.

Members of the nurses' union held a rally in December to protest the newly discovered leave cuts.

They hung posters outlining the contract issue in hundreds of businesses in the Greater Portland area. In addition, O'Sullivan said, about 50 nurses and a union representative dressed as Santa Claus visited the office of Maine Medical Center President Jeff Sanders to deliver a basket of coal.

"Getting the community involved was important to keep public pressure on management," O'Sullivan said. "We sent a really clear message to Maine Med – the same way we will always fight for our patients, we're going to fight for each other. I think they know they can't mess with us the same way anymore."

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