

Dear colleagues,

My name is Jake Zavertnik and I am an RN on Weinberg 5C. I have worked on the unit for just over two years. I love my coworkers and think overall we have a very good workplace culture on 5C. That said, I have several concerns with Kathleen Costigan's open letter to her colleagues. She speaks with authority about unions, but I fear she is misrepresenting the facts. Below are summaries of her points, along with my response.

*Kathleen's point: After union dues, the benefits in her salary were negligible.*

- **Realities:**

1. As Kathleen admits, she received the highest salary in Boston while working at Brigham and Women's Hospital. It is not a coincidence that this hospital was a union hospital.
2. With the NNU, union dues are 1.1 hours of your base pay per pay period. So, if you make \$40/hr, your union dues are \$44 every two weeks. When we negotiate a raise into our contract, here's what it would like if you make \$40/hr.
  - 2% pay raise = \$64 pay raise (every 2 weeks);
  - 3% pay raise = \$96 pay raise (every 2 weeks);
  - 4% pay raise = \$128 pay raise (every 2 weeks);
  - 5% pay raise = \$160 pay raise (every 2 weeks);

As you can see, even if we negotiate a nominal yearly pay raise (something that we don't have guaranteed without a contract), we would come out ahead of union dues.

3. Most importantly, **we pay no dues until we vote on and sign a contract. This means, we only start paying once we start receiving the benefits of a union contract. We don't lose anything in the meantime**

*Kathleen's point: The union pits nurses against one another.*

- **Realities:**

1. The union is a democracy. This means nurses have an active say in deciding things collectively. Currently, we have a corporatist structure - only administrators have a true voice in deciding changes to our pay, benefits, and staffing. Two examples; our recent PACE changes and the changes to our EHP benefits were implemented without us having a chance to have a say on them.
2. The union will help benefit all nurses in the hospital. Our primary job as RNs is to advocate for our patients. But how can we advocate for patients if we can't advocate for ourselves and our fellow nurses, especially those on units with inferior staffing and resources?
3. Seniority rewards those who have put in the time. It also helps ensure a safe workplace culture, as the most experienced nurses tend to be our unit experts.

*Kathleen's point: Union's can't be voted out.*

- **Realities:**

1. Unions can be voted out, but as a democracy, it requires a majority of the nurses within the union to do so. The reason why unions often don't get decertified is because the vast majority of nurses don't want it.

*Kathleen's point: Because of the union, RNs voted with their feet (i.e., they left the hospital).*

- **Realities:**

1. Hopkins has an extremely high turnover rate. Are nurses here not already voting with their feet?
2. We are fighting for a clear, transparent and just pay scale that articulates when we will get raises, and how much we will get each year. Raises are currently given out at the discretion of the hospital. And without a contract, they can take away anything they promise us. Many new nurses use Hopkins as a launching pad for their career, leaving Baltimore for better pay and benefits because there is no clear pay structure.

*Kathleen's point: Unions will standardize all units in a one-size fits all approach.*

- **Realities:**

1. Our union contract can set safe staffing minimums, but won't set maximums. Individual units will have the ability to keep or change current standards. The same goes for issues like scheduling, each unit can vote to do scheduling the way that they want to. We can keep our unit specific practices if we want, but by voting to form a union, we guarantee that nurses across the hospital have a voice.

*Kathleen's point: Unions create a negative work environment.*

- **Realities:**

1. We are a research institution and we should use facts to determine work environment ratings. What are our Gallup poll results? Doesn't a negative work environment usually go hand-in-hand with a retention problem? Hasn't the administrators acknowledged openly that we have a retention problem? A union contract does not create a negative work environment, it simply creates a protocol we can follow if we have a grievance or feel unsafe at work.

I am happy to talk personally with anyone who has questions or concerns about what we are fighting for. At the very least, I'm sure we could have a productive conversation and ensure everyone has an opportunity to consider the facts and all perspectives on the issue.

Sincerely,

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