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Frontline staff at Headwaters hold rally

By Sam Odrowski

Healthcare workers across Ontario, including those at Headwaters, represented by the SIEU Union, held a rally in front of the local hospital on Tuesday (July 27) to speak out against wage cuts, concessions, and Bill 124.

The bill, which was enacted by the province, limits compensation increases for public sector workers to one per cent per year, which is less than one third of the current rate of inflation.

Bill 124 also bars healthcare workers from negotiating for much needed mental health supports, following a hectic 16 months of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are nearly 70,000 hospital workers across Ontario currently negotiating a new provincial contract and SIEU Union Representative, Laurie Chapman is one of them. She shared with Citizen at the local rally what prompted her to come out.

?It's about the repeal of Bill 124 and giving these nurses and health care providers the respect that they deserve. Let them freely collectively bargain,? she said. ?Right now, the Ford government has limited any kind of negotiation to a one per cent total compensation, which includes everything that would cost money ? limits it to one per cent.

?That's not freely bargaining, that's not allowing us to actually go to the table and try and negotiate something that is fair for these healthcare workers who have gone through hell for the last 18 months, and continue to go through hell,? Chapman added.

She explained that frontline staff at Headwaters and across the province can't go on vacation or have any time off and they're constantly short on staff due to many workers leaving the field, yet they continue to persevere each and every day.

At a time when so many healthcare workers have left the field due to the pandemic, restricting their ability to properly negotiate for a wage consistent with inflation is just going to further the problem as well, said Chapman.

?In fact, [the one per cent limit] does produce a wage decrease to those of us who have stuck it out, who have remained, who have stayed in the profession,? she explained, in reference to the wage increase being below inflation.

Sherry Young, who's a SIEU Union Steward, said she feels completely disregarded by the Ford government

?You feel like you're not respected, like you're not worthwhile,? she said.

Going forward, Young and Chapman both noted that they'd like to see Bill 124 repealed and for the provincial government to allow negotiations to happen fairly.

On September 10, prior to returning to the bargaining table from September 13 to 17, the SIEU Union and PCHU-CUPE are holding a province-wide day of action to show hospital employers and the Ford government that they're ready to fight for what is fair.

Chapman said she encourages all healthcare workers to stand up and show their support.

?If we want to make change this is one way to try and do it,? she said.