

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR: Wednesday, September 6, 2017

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Riverside County Employees to Go On Strike; Demands Include a Halt to Chronic Safety Breaches and an End to Labor Law Violations

SEIU 721 Represented Riverside County Employees Including Health Care Providers, Social Workers, Correctional Officers, Mental Health Care Workers, Engineers, and Other Frontline Public Service Providers Walk Off the Job; Riverside County on the Hook for a Whopping 19 Labor Law Violations and Demands of Transparency Amidst the Use of Millions of Taxpayer Dollars for Sweetheart Consulting Contracts

Riverside, CA—Frontline public service providers take the ultimate stand against Riverside County management's rampant labor law violations and the increasingly dangerous working conditions continually ignored by County officials. Their Unfair Labor Practice strike is a direct response to the County *racking up an incredible 19 labor law violations* throughout the bargaining process, stemming from the surveillance and harassment of County employees and their refusal to be transparent about critical information regarding their use of millions in taxpayer dollars.

The County's bad faith bargaining took an especially sickening turn when county officials *inexplicably yanked a Safety Proposal from the current bargaining process, despite the fact that incidents like the one* experienced by ER Registered Nurse Teri Lopez, whose head was violently slammed into the ground repeatedly by a patient had been reported.

Who: Riverside County Employees, Community Advocates, Residents and Taxpayers

What: Workers Strike Due to Unfair Labor Practices

When: Wednesday, September 6, 2017 at 6:30 a.m.

Where: Riverside University Hospital, 26520 Cactus Ave, Moreno Valley, CA 92555

Community leaders and fellow Riverside County residents are expected to join workers in their demands for a fair and transparent process, so that both patient and employee safety and the strengthening of vital public services can be properly addressed. Riverside County officials have been heavily criticized for their reckless revenue waste, including *spending over \$140 million in taxpayer dollars on sweetheart consulting contracts and a toxic Wall Street swap deal*, while the demands of workers and residents for an investment in vital public services continue to be ignored.

Among the long list of Unfair Labor Practices is the County's failure to provide critical information needed to properly assess the levels of staffing and services needed to meet the public needs.

The County's lack of transparency was particularly criticized as County officials callously dismissed proposals to expand critical health and mental health care services, but then handed out millions in taxpayer dollars to foreign consulting giants, to essentially do the job that top county executives are *already* paid to do. Workers and residents point to excessively long wait times and insufficient level of services needed to meet the public need, while County officials continue to deny access to the critical data needed to assess how public services are being compromised. At Riverside University Health Services facilities, the average wait time for patient in the ER before being admitted is eleven hours and ten minutes, while the national average is only five hours and thirty-eight minutes.

Workers represented by SEIU 721 are determined to raise up their voices against the county's law breaking practices in order to address increasing safety concerns and the need to invest and strengthen vital public services.

Background:

Safety Breaches

In response to increasingly dangerous working conditions that have been continually ignored by Riverside County management, this past April Riverside County employees hosted three days of self-defense classes at worksites across the County to equip workers with the skills needed to stay safe on the job.

The self-defense classes came as a result of an assault against a Nurse at the Riverside University Hospital, where a patient repeatedly slammed the nurse's head on the ground and attempted to bite her on the back of her neck until a co-worker came to her defense. Nurses at the flagship hospital, health clinics and incarceration facilities repeatedly endure a working environment where patients can be mentally unstable, suicidal, or homicidal – making basic safety measures indispensable. Videos documenting the worker's plight against unsafe working condition and their call on Riverside County Officials: [Thousands Deliver Petitions](#), [We Must Protect Ourselves](#), [KPFK Coverage](#), [Riverside County Employees Resort to Self Defense](#)

Riverside County management responded to the worker-organized self-defense classes with the surveillance of workers during their break time, breaking labor law to harass and spy on County employees even as deadly weapons continue to be confiscated by nurses at the hospital.

Revenue Waste

Time and time again, Riverside county has chosen to sacrifice vital public services and its frontline civil servants to balance budgets, while continuing to squander millions of taxpayer dollars on sweetheart consulting contracts and millions more on a toxic swap deal they have yet to renegotiate. The additional \$40 million recently given to KPMG consulting firm received criticism even from County Board Supervisor Kevin Jeffries who [told the Press Enterprise](#):

“Seeking external evaluations can be a valuable tool to make the needed changes. But when the bill due for those external evaluators actually starts costing you the loss of services to the public, you have to question who’s being served — the taxpayers or the consulting firm?”

“It is very clear to me,” Jeffries added. “That the additional \$20 million we are going to pay KPMG is going to come from taxpayer funds that could otherwise be used to pay for essential public services. This is happening at a time when we need every dollar we can find.”

At the end of the day, while lucrative consulting contracts are being expanded, vital public services are being shortchanged and public frontline workers are being asked to go without the additional resources needed to meet the public’s needs and to retain and recruit skilled service providers.

On the "swap deal," approved by a body of Board of Supervisors that included Supervisor John Tavaglione, the County was sold on the idea of an interest rate swap as a means of achieving a lower “synthetic” fixed rate than could be achieved by issuing plain vanilla fixed-rate bonds. Riverside County was not alone in being duped into these swap deals; other municipalities like the City of Richmond, the City of San Francisco, and Jefferson County in Alabama also made similar dealings.

As a result of entering into this bad deal, the County has already paid \$48.9 million in excessive fees and is on the hook for up to \$20.5 million more until the deal ends in 2032, totaling a possible \$69.4 million in wasted taxpayer money. At the time the County considered this deal, it could have issued variable rate debt with no swap and saved up to \$69.4 million in bank fees over the life of this bad deal. Unlike Riverside County, the City of Richmond, the City of San Francisco, and Jefferson County in Alabama have all successfully renegotiated the terms of their bank deals. To date, there is no record of the Riverside County CEO attempting to renegotiate the toxic swap deal with Wells Fargo in order to save millions that could be used for critical County services.

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