

SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin: Healthcare workers respond to Vos, Evers COVID plans

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'We are still deep in this crisis nine months later because of the failure of lawmakers to act ... No matter how late or small, a step forward is welcomed'

WISCONSIN — Following Governor Tony Evers and Speaker Robin Vos' announcements this week that they will roll out new initiatives to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic across the state, essential healthcare workers are encouraged, but caution lawmakers that failure to enact prompt and comprehensive policies will lead to more of the devastation already faced by Wisconsinites.

Ramon Argandona, President of SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin and Environmental Services hospital worker in Madison, issued the following statement:

"Wisconsin faces one of the worst COVID crises in the nation. Inaction for more than half a year and during the worsening of the pandemic has been unacceptable — for those we have lost, for all those who have lost a loved one, for healthcare workers and all essential workers, for entire communities, and for the economic vitality of our state. We are still deep in this crisis nine months after its onset because of lawmakers' failure to act.

"Decisive and urgent action months ago to develop a comprehensive plan including widespread and rapid testing, mask mandates and their enforcement, stay-at-home

orders, contact tracing, and supplemental unemployment benefits would have slowed the spread of the virus, saved precious lives, and strengthened our economy.

“No matter how late or small, a step forward is welcomed by frontline healthcare workers. We acknowledge state leaders for exploring negotiations for a legislative package. Solid measures like workers’ compensation for healthcare workers and increased testing are a start. But also policy-makers should look to the framework of solutions developed by healthcare workers on the front lines.

“Months ago, SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin gathered together union and non-union healthcare workers along with interested state policy makers to propose legislation supporting frontline healthcare workers based upon what they said they needed. The Healthcare Heroes Act would ensure that every healthcare worker in Wisconsin has paid sick leave, hazard pay, and coverage of all costs of COVID-19-related healthcare.

“Gov. Evers, Speaker Vos and other legislators should include these measures in any package for COVID-19 response. Likewise, policy-makers must take seriously the drastic steps necessary to arrest the spread of the virus by adopting a statewide mask mandate backed by real enforcement as well as a stay-at-home order paired with income support for those who would experience employment effects.

“While negotiating over an immediate COVID-19 response package, state leaders should also agree upon a consensus vaccine distribution system based upon what the Evers administration’s Department of Health Services has created so that there are no obstacles or opposition when we reach this crucial moment. All state leaders must be on board with healthcare workers and other essential workers being at the front of the line for a vaccine and for efficient, effective deployment to the general population without delay.”