

Sen. Agard, Rep. Subeck: Introduce legislation to restore collective bargaining rights at UW Health

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MADISON – Today, State Senator Melissa Agard (D-Madison) and Representative Lisa Subeck (D-Madison) will join registered nurses to announce legislation which would empower all employees of the UW Hospitals and Clinics Authority to have a union voice. Nurses say the “Union Voice for Quality Care at UW Health Act” is urgently needed to ensure they have a seat at the table to solve grave systemic problems which were exposed by the pandemic. This legislation will allow them to advocate effectively for themselves and their patients.

The Act would grant UWHCA employees the statutory right to form a union and collectively bargain over their conditions of employment. Nurses at UW Hospital had a union and a collective bargaining agreement until it expired in 2014. Upon the expiration of the contract, the UWHCA Board refused to recognize the nurses’ union or negotiate a new agreement, citing Wisconsin Act 10.

Senator Agard, Representative Subeck, and Tami Burns (RN) released the following statements:

Senator Melissa Agard:

“Day after day, hospital staff showed up to care for us, keep our communities safe, and go above and beyond the call of duty. They wrestled with the gut-wrenching anxiety of infecting their own family members, and often went months without seeing loved ones. After this once in a lifetime pandemic, the least they deserve is

having a seat at the table to negotiate for better working conditions.

“It is now time for all of us—elected officials, community members, faith leaders and the labor movement—to stand arm-in-arm with nurses and frontline workers at UW hospital and healthcare institutions throughout our state to make sure they have a union voice so they can advocate for themselves and their families.”

Representative Lisa Subeck:

“Our nurses and other frontline healthcare workers have risked their lives and the lives of their families over the last year to provide quality, compassionate care to us, our families, our friends, and our neighbors when we needed it the most. We owe them the same respect and dignity that they provide for their patients – for us – every single day, no matter how difficult the circumstances. A union voice would provide that respect and dignity, and it would allow nurses to advocate not only for themselves and their families, but also for their patients. A majority of UW nurses have expressed their support for a union, and the UWHCA board should voluntarily recognize it. Absent that recognition, our bill would finally empower our UW frontline healthcare workers with a union voice.”

Tami Burns, RN:

“For many years now, there has been a severe nursing shortage, and a constant revolving door as nurses leave the profession due to exhaustion and burn out. Meanwhile Wisconsin’s patient population is older and sicker, and requires more advanced care than ever before. The best way to address this crisis—and protect quality patient care—is by making sure frontline healthcare workers have a real, meaningful voice in our work through a union. That’s why my colleagues and I are passionately supporting the Union Voice for Quality Care at UW Health Act, so we can ensure the highest standards of excellence for our hospital, and the integrity of our entire healthcare system moving forward.”