

CUNA Mutual Group workers strike as company 'remains fully committed' to reaching deal with union

Posted on Monday, May 22, 2023

As hundreds of CUNA Mutual Group workers in Madison began a labor strike Friday, the company said it “remains fully committed” to reaching a collective bargaining agreement with the union.

More than 450 employees represented by the Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 39 were on strike Friday, according to a release from Wisconsin AFL-CIO. The OPEIU chapter says workers’ top priorities for the contract negotiations are related to compensation, job security, remote work, retirement security and health care.

In a statement Friday, state AFL-CIO President Stephanie Bloomingdale said the workers are seeking to ensure union jobs stay in the state, receive fair wages, have the ability to “retire with dignity after a lifetime of work” and obtain affordable, high-quality health care.

“As union men and women, we do not take the decision to strike lightly,” Bloomingdale said. “The history of our union movement has clearly demonstrated that only by standing shoulder to shoulder have working people gained the family-supporting wages, pay equity and other benefits which we are rightly due.”

In an emailed statement, a spokesperson for the insurance and investment services business said CUNA Mutual Group has approached negotiations with the union “in good faith” and continues to do so.

“We have had thoughtful conversations, listening carefully to the issues outlined by the Union, and talking through complex issues facing our company, customers and employees,” the spokesperson said. “We have provided proposals that address the issues and have continued to make changes to move toward an agreement with the

union.”

The spokesperson noted the company’s contract proposal includes a double-digit percentage pay increase, an increase to bonus structure and a cash bonus, while maintaining current health benefits and adding a health savings account. And it would maintain remote work policies for full-time workers, provide a monthly stipend for virtual employees, and maintain retirement benefits for current employees along with a 401k employer match of up to 5 percent.

Still, the union says it’s “been forced to file numerous unfair labor practice charges” against CUNA for allegedly violating federal labor law, including “the unjustified retaliatory firing of our chief steward,” Joe Evica.

“OPEIU Local 39 has been representing employees at CUNA Mutual Group/TruStage for more than 80 years,” the union wrote on its website. “Never once in those years have we found it necessary for us to strike. Yet, we have never seen management stoop to the levels they have to avoid bargaining in good faith, either.”

When the union called for a strike authorization vote in April, 87 percent of members showed up and 92 percent voted to approve the strike, the site shows.

In a statement Friday, Madison Dem Rep. Lisa Subeck said she supports the striking workers.

“Outsourcing jobs, firing employees for union activity, and walking away from the bargaining table are all good ways to build a bad reputation here,” she said, also noting the union members have been working without a contract for more than 400 days.

CUNA Mutual Group says it respects its workers’ decision to strike, and has “business resiliency plans” in place to ensure its services aren’t interrupted as negotiations continue.

-By Alex Moe