

Our Union Difference: **We Won a Better Process for Furloughs**

Our action moved management to respect our union voice and ensured our values are included in the furlough process. It is clear that if we did not have a strong union, UW Medicine would have been able to move forward with scattershot furlough plans without transparency or the commitments we need. Instead, our union difference showed that we can influence and shape what management can and cannot do when they are trying to balance their budget. While we are proud of the work we did to limit UW Medicine's furlough power, we must remain vigilant for our patients and cannot agree to furlough plans that will compromise our patients' safety.



"We worked for multiple days and on the last day bargained over 15 hours with administration to come up with job protections and safety considerations for employees, and clear, fair guidelines for managers to follow to prepare for this furlough. We needed to ask the tough questions and push management to make sure that patient safety was first and foremost in their minds, and that people had jobs to

come back to. These are unprecedented times and I am so glad to have a memorandum of understanding that protects us and the patients that we care for. I am thankful I am in a union so we had a say in this difficult process." **Grace Yang, RN, Interventional Radiology, Harborview SEIU 1199NW Executive Board Member**



"Our union gave us a voice through this process to make sure we have safe staffing during the furlough and to make sure managers don't utilize the low census excessively in the place of furloughs. This was my first bargaining with our union and it was a great opportunity to be the voice for my co-workers. I learned that we can make a change if we step up and work together. We need to stay involved to raise

our voices. When we unite, we win for our families and our patients." **Ade Adeyemo, CNA, Ortho/Neuro Surgical Floor, Northwest Hospital**



"Management tried to enact furloughs across the board that were applied unfairly and with no assurance that employees' benefits, positions, and protections as union members would be respected. Thanks to our bargaining team's work we won an agreement that ensured that members would not lose their benefits, vacation accruals, and position while they were furloughed. We also won a process to apply furloughs that was consistent between departments and did not unjustly burden our most vulnerable employees." **Faith Eastwood, Physical Therapist, Northwest Hospital**

We won furlough protections together

- Voluntary furloughs will be assigned to prevent as many involuntary furloughs as possible
- Voluntary furloughs will be given by highest seniority, one week at a time so as many employees as possible have an opportunity to volunteer
- Protections to ensure we come back to the same jobs including shift, schedule, FTE, position and pay
- Protection of our existing staffing plans, matrices, and practices
- Involuntary furloughs will be assigned in one-week increments
- Prioritize week-long furloughs to maximize unemployment benefits
- If a furlough would go beyond the CARES Act (entitling us to an extra \$600/week), we have the right to bargain the impacts
- Lump sum payments will continue as scheduled and will not impact our eligibility for unemployment
- Progression raise, vacation and sick accrual dates will remain unchanged
- We will continue to accrue holiday, vacation and sick time while we are furloughed
- We will be able to use 8 hours of any type of our accrued time off per month to protect our insurance benefits
- We can volunteer for early recall from furlough if that is the best choice for us and our families; however, we cannot be forced to return early
- Those of us on work visas won't be forced to take furlough that could impact our visa status
- This is a non-precedent setting agreement, recognizing these extraordinary times
- At UWMC - Northwest, if low census exists for more than two days we can request to furlough for a week
- At Airlift NW, furloughs will not lead to base closures

"Because we have such a strong union, we were able to bargain and create a fair furlough process, including allowing us to volunteer to furlough. This also gives us the opportunity to protect our vulnerable co-workers." **Jessica Hawtree, Patient Services Specialist, Northwest Medical Specialties Clinic,**



Furlough FAQ

Q: I want to volunteer for furlough, but I've been waiting for this agreement. Should I volunteer?

A: Because of our agreement, we feel confident that it is safe for you to volunteer for furloughs if that is the right decision for you and your family. You should email your manager to volunteer before Friday, May 29 and you can volunteer to furlough for up to 8 weeks. Volunteer furlough weeks will be awarded highest seniority first.

Q: Can I volunteer for a reduced FTE or a furlough that is less than a week long?

A: Yes, you can volunteer for a reduced FTE or a furlough that is less than a week long; however, we recommend for nearly everyone to try to volunteer for full week furlough increments because that will result in the highest payment from unemployment.

Q: I can't afford a furlough. What should I do?

A: Many of us are worried about making ends meet during periods of furlough. First, volunteers may be able to cover the furlough needs of your unit or department. Also, our agreement only allows for involuntary furloughs that maximize unemployment benefits. For some of us, the unemployment weekly payments right now may be more than we usually make in a week because of the CARES Act.

Q: Will my furlough turn into a permanent layoff?

A: No, our furloughs should not turn into a permanent layoff. If UW wants to decrease our FTEs or lay us off, they still need to provide a 30-day notice and follow our CBA.

Q: How do I protect my insurance benefits during a furlough 4 weeks or longer?

A: You will need to use 8 hours of accrued time to maintain your insurance benefits or you should not volunteer for a full month.

Q: Will this impact my retirement?

A: No, our continuous service date will not be impacted.

Q: Will I come back to my same position?

A: Yes, you are guaranteed the same schedule, shift, FTE, position and pay.

Q: What do I do if my unit's staffing is unsafe during the furloughs?

A: Administration committed to maintain our current staffing practices. We need to take action, fill out short staffing forms, and file grievances if administration does not meet our current staffing practices.

Q: How do holidays impact my unemployment eligibility?

A: Taking a paid holiday could reduce your unemployment payment. You may wish to bank your holiday instead.

Q: How much unemployment can I get?

A: We are recommending to not volunteer for furloughs that are less than one week so that you can maximize how much unemployment will pay you. Visit <https://esd.wa.gov/unemployment/calculate-your-benefit> to estimate your unemployment benefit.

Q: When does my unemployment begin?

A: Washington has waived the one-week waiting period, so benefits should begin as of the date you apply, except that under CARES, benefits are available retroactively back to January 27, 2020. The unemployment office is handling an unprecedented number of unemployment claims, and will issue checks on approved claims as quickly as possible, but it may take longer than usual. If you need assistance in the interim, please see additional available resources here: wa.gov

We need to unite to keep our patients and staff safe

UW Medicine administration has committed to existing staffing plans and that furloughs should not impact patient safety, agreeing to recall furloughed employees as needed to meet patient needs and to rescind future furlough offers as patient volumes increase. In bargaining, administration admitted they based their census and occupancy rates on the lockdown months of March and April when we were not doing elective procedures. These plans would not meet the needs of patients during normal conditions.

We can all see our patient volumes are likely to increase as stay-at-home orders are relaxed and as we resume elective procedures. In that case, the current furlough plans would be unsafe and unfair. We are demanding a clear, accountable, timely review process for ongoing furlough plans based on patient need and safe staffing.

We are our patients' best advocates. We should be prepared to speak up and take action when we see the budget is being prioritized over patient care and safety — including utilizing Short Staffing Forms, Patient Safety Network reports (PSNs), and speaking up about our staffing shortfalls and patient safety concerns. We have a right and responsibility to see that our patients' care does not suffer due to budget concerns.



“Administration is basing furlough numbers on shutdown census data. We know these numbers won't work for our patients. We won job protection and unemployment benefits for our staff but will need to hold administration accountable and take action to ensure safe staffing plans are met.” **Sam Conley, RN, 3WH, Harborview Medical Center**



“All healthcare workers are an integral part of the health care system providing the necessary care to our patient population. I understand that UW has budgetary challenges leading to furloughs. The entire respiratory department has been furloughed, which could lead to short staffing and delaying necessary respiratory treatments. All of us need to feel empowered by voicing our concerns if these furloughs impact staffing and patient care.” **Neeru Kaur, Respiratory Therapist, Harborview Medical Center**