



July 2, 2021

Mr. Kenneth E. Berkovitz  
Senior VP & Ministry Market Executive  
Ascension Health & Ascension Michigan  
4600 Edmundson Rd  
St. Louis, MO 63134

Vice President Berkovitz:

We, the undersigned members of the Michigan legislature, are writing about a number of concerns raised by employees at your Michigan hospitals.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses and other hospital workers have risked their lives, and their mental health, to care for desperately ill patients. Many have gone above and beyond the call of duty in this regard. These essential workers deserve to be treated with the highest levels of dignity and respect, which makes what they are telling us so concerning.

During the height of the pandemic, nurses, doctors and other hospital workers were forced to handle patient caseloads beyond anyone's imagination, while working through long hours and exhaustion. This was because of a crisis that posed a threat to life not seen in a hundred years.

Now that the pandemic has come under control, we would expect that hospitals would honor the tremendous sacrifices their employees made to save the lives of the people of Michigan. Yet, it appears that your hospitals are now telling nurses they must permanently accept workloads that rival their experience in the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has been reported to us that:

- Patient-to-nurse ratios in the ICU and other critical units are often 50 to 400 percent higher than they should be;
- Understaffing that began before the pandemic has worsened during the pandemic, leading to management often forcing staff to work a full second shift after already working for 8-12 hours straight;
- Ascension Genesys has disciplined nurses and other employees for saying no to forced overtime, or for being absent while in COVID quarantine or having childcare issues;
- Ascension Genesys has refused to follow its employees' contracts, including:
  - Unilaterally changing the grievance and discipline process;
  - Unilaterally requiring nurses to wear tracking devices;
  - Forcing nurses to do the work of non-nursing employees.
- Ascension is using Mick Crowley as its Director of Associate Relations, who was previously an Executive Vice President at the notorious "union avoidance" firm Adams Nash Haskell & Sheridan.



Now Ascension hospitals are experiencing record levels of senior nurses quitting their jobs and recent nursing school graduates and temporary nurses are replacing them in large numbers. New nurses traditionally learn much of their skills on the job from more experienced senior nurses, and temp nurses are not meant to take the place of full-time nurses in large numbers. Michigan residents, who are an increasingly aging population that needs quality healthcare, deserve better than this.

We appreciate how hard hospitals have worked to care for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, that care is coming from the staff who work in your hospitals, and these workers must be protected so that they can provide safe, effective care to their patients that does not come at the expense of their own health and well-being. With revenues in the billions, and having received at least \$1.8 billion in federal COVID-19 funds, Ascension does not appear to have fiscal constraints when it comes to making sure its hospitals are properly staffed.

Hospital workers have rights at work, and those rights must be respected. This includes following their negotiated union contracts and not using union-busters as labor relations staff. As Michigan lawmakers, we take Michigan workers' rights and labor laws seriously. We have high expectations for a national hospital chain that prides itself on its Catholic values.

In addition to how all these issues affect essential hospital workers, these practices can also have deleterious effects on patients. We hope to hear from you as soon as possible on how you plan to remedy these issues.

Sincerely,

The Michigan Legislative Labor Caucus Executive Board

Representative Terry J. Sabo, Chair

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Representative Brenda Carter, Executive Vice Chair

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Representative Regina Weiss, Secretary

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Representative John Cherry, Treasurer

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cc: Joseph Impicchiche, CEO, Ascension Health  
Gretchen Whitmer, Governor, State of Michigan  
Chris Palazzolo, Ascension Genesys CEO