



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jessica Ramos

'Do the right thing': Nurses rally outside Elmhurst Hospital for fair contract, better pay

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New York City public hospital nurses rally outside Elmhurst Hospital on June 22, demanding a new contract and pay equity.

[New York State Nurses Association](#) (NYSNA) nurses rallied outside multiple major New York City public hospitals on June 22, including at [Elmhurst Hospital](#), to demand a new contract and pay equity.

The simultaneous rallies were part of planned protests throughout the next two weeks in which nurses are calling on Mayor Eric Adams “to do the right thing for racial and healthcare justice for New Yorkers” and settle a fair contract.

New York City public hospital nurses, who have been without a contract since March 2, earn around \$20,000 less than their counterparts in the private sector, and the pay disparity makes it difficult to hire new nurses and retain nurses, leading to chronic understaffing at NYC public hospitals, according to NYSNA.

NYSNA says the city could easily afford to pay public hospital nurses what they deserve if it stopped hiring travel nurses to combat understaffing and high turnover and save hundreds of millions of dollars.

In 2022, NYC Health + Hospitals (NYC H+H), which operates the public hospitals and clinics in New York City, spent \$549 million on traveling nurses. The average hourly rate for temp nurses is \$163.50, nearly 3.5 times what staff nurses make. However, according to Politico, the city corrected the number after NYC Comptroller Brad Lander addressed his concerns about out-of-control spending in a letter to NYC H+H on June 6.

Even using the city's lower number, NYC spends at least \$1.5 million on temp nurses every day that they fail to settle a fair contract that keeps qualified staff nurses at the bedside, NYSNA said in a statement.

And the city is already on track to exceed last year's figure, having already spent \$401.8 million on temporary travel nurses in the first few months of fiscal year 2023.

Outside Elmhurst Hospital, which was the "epicenter of the epicenter" during the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses and politicians alike pointed out how the first responders were hailed as heroes and "serenaded" with pots and pans every evening at 7 pm as a token of appreciation for their heroic efforts trying to save lives under the most excruciating circumstances.

Nurses now want to see appreciation and recognition of their sacrifices through a fair contract and higher pay, not pure symbolism and lip service.

Some nurses questioned what had happened to their "hero status." Pediatric ER nurse Muhammad Islam recalled how community leaders called them the "heroes of the epicenter."

"It is not that we are asking to give us \$200,000. We are asking for justice in payment. [Community leaders] are deaf now. They don't hear us," Islam said, reminding Hizzoner that NYSNA endorsed him.

“Time is coming when you will need us,” Islam said. “So in the next election, if you need our vote ... guys, remember.”

Registered nurse Petar Lovric remembered the steps he and his colleagues took to protect their families during COVID-19.

“[We] stripped ourselves before we came into our house [and] sent our families away out of state,” Lovric said. “We ran out of supplies. We ran out of meds. We were the COVID ICU hospital. That’s what we turned into.”

Nurse practitioner Mary Catherine Madden shared she was working “bedside” during the COVID-19 pandemic, helping to feed patients as they struggled to breathe.

“Watching all of you suffer under the PPE, and now it’s all a memory,” Madden said, addressing her colleagues. “They come to negotiations with empty pockets, trying to wear us down, trying to demoralize us. But we will not be worn down.”

State Senator Jessica Ramos said there was no difference between private and public sector nurses.

“A nurse is a nurse,” Ramos said. “A registered and trained nurse knows what he or she is doing and must be compensated for all the work that [they’ve] done.”

[Read the full story](#)