

If We Decide to Strike:

Q&A for University Members



Why are we preparing for a strike?

After months of negotiating, the university system has dug in on inadequate COLAs, step freezes, and a cost-shifting healthcare proposal that could result in classified workers' healthcare costs going higher and higher with no end in sight. And while insisting on these cuts, management has also made proposals to weaken job security through three of our most important contract provisions.

Classified staff members have already been making it clear that the university system's union busting proposals and insulting economic offer are not acceptable – through email and letters to university and OUS officials, through rallies, and through signs and placards. But management's bargaining team is not listening! That's why we have to raise the stakes: we're asking members to sign onto a strike pledge petition. Many times, workers' making preparations to strike can convince management to start bargaining fairly and thus prevent a strike.

These preparations will serve the dual purpose of strengthening our position at the bargaining table and will also prepare us to launch a successful strike if it becomes necessary.

What can I do now to avoid a strike?

Continue to show solidarity with your coworkers, participate in workplace and campus actions, and sign a strike pledge to give our bargaining team the power to win the best contract possible. Signing a strike pledge is an indication of your intentions, but there are more steps to take before a strike could be called.

Will bargaining continue during strike preparations?

We are prepared to bargain at any time, even during strike planning and preparation.

Who decides to conduct a strike?

You do. Our Union Bargaining Team will ask for authorization from members to initiate a strike, if necessary to move the university system, and all members will have the right to vote on the decision. If a strike occurs, the bargaining team would also make the decision to call for a vote of the membership to end the strike.

Who can vote?

All members in good standing. Fair share payers must first sign up as members to become eligible to vote.

Who can strike?

All members, fair-share payers and trial service employees in the bargaining unit may strike.

How long would a strike last?

We will decide. In the past, university strikes have been relatively brief, lasting for one week or less. Any decision to return to work will be made by the membership, hopefully as a result of a fair settlement.

If the strike lasts long enough will there be strike benefits?

Yes, but they won't match short-term salary loss. Each month, \$.50 per dues payer is placed in a Strike and Job Protection Fund with 30 cents allotted solely to pay benefits in the event of a strike.

At its May meeting, the Board of Directors allocated \$1.5 million into the Strike Benefit Account and \$500,000 into the statewide Hardship Account. The Strike Benefit account would be used to pay a stipend to striking members in a weekly amount and based on eligibility criteria also established by the statewide Hardship Committee. In accordance with the union's Administrative Policies and Procedures, strike stipends of \$225/week would commence after the 7th day of a strike. The Hardship Account would be used to provide individual assistance to members who are facing particular hardship as a result of loss of income from participating in a strike. For example, in the past members who were on the verge of being evicted, losing their homes, or having essential utilities discontinued received assistance.

Locals or individual worksites can also host events to raise strike funds, including food drives and bake sales. These events help show the state that we are serious. For more information on economic ways to prepare for a strike, see the document "10 ways to prepare for a strike."

Are all members expected to picket?

Yes. It is essential that we have strong picket lines throughout our strike to keep people from crossing our lines and to allow other unions and campus allies to support our strike. Strike benefits and hardship aid are only available to members who show up on the picket lines. Accommodations will be made for members with disabilities that prevent them from walking a picket line.

What happens if a represented worker crosses our picket line?

While the law allows unions to sanction members for anti-union activity, and this has been done in rare occasions, this has never been an effective way to organize strike support. We would do all we could to convince fellow workers that it is in their best interests now and in the future to honor the line until a fair settlement is reached.

What about health insurance during a strike?

Employees must work a minimum of 80 hours in a pay period to qualify for insurance benefits for the following month. Once members authorize a strike, part of the strategy in setting the strike date includes ensuring that full-time workers can complete their 80 hours for insurance eligibility. Part-time workers who walk the picket line can apply for hardship benefits to assist with COBRA payments to maintain insurance coverage.

Can I use accrued vacation and sick leave during a strike?

No, workers cannot use or accrue leave during a strike.

How will the strike affect retirement benefits and seniority?

Strike time is treated as unpaid leave. Strikers do not receive retirement benefits or seniority credit when they are on strike.

Can strikers get unemployment benefits while on strike?

No. You are not eligible to receive unemployment benefits while on strike.

Can anyone be fired or replaced for striking?

You cannot be disciplined for participating in a lawful strike. Although the law may allow the employer to permanently replace striking workers, it has not happened in previous public sector strikes and we would not return to work without protecting all workers as part of the strike settlement.

Won't a strike play into their hands by saving management money?

A strike is our collective statement of power and purpose. We are taking the power out of the university's hands and standing together to demand fair treatment. The money the university saves doesn't make up for the power they lose when we stand united and in the end, if we strike, we're asking management to dig deeper than they'd otherwise be willing to do.

Overview of Process to Determine a Strike:

- Our Union Bargaining Team calls for a strike authorization vote based on what's happening at the bargaining table. Determination of whether a strike authorization vote is needed will likely happen in September, based on when legally-required timelines run out.
- Decision time: If members authorize a strike, the bargaining team has the ability to call a strike based on meeting the required timelines under the law which includes both sides laying out final offers and a "cooling off" period. The bargaining team will only call a strike if they believe our striking is necessary in order to win a better settlement.