

May 15 Marks One-Year Anniversary of Historic Butler Hospital Strike

Photo credit: Dominique Sindayiganza | @sindayiganza

One year later, workplace violence and turnover have significantly dropped while wages have climbed

To arrange an interview with Butler workers, contact 860-280-6443 or comms@seiu1199ne.org

PROVIDENCE, R.I -- Today marks one year since frontline caregivers at Butler Hospital launched what became Rhode Island's longest hospital strike. On May 15, 2025, hundreds of registered nurses, mental health workers, dietary staff, environmental service workers, clerical staff, and others began an open-ended unfair labor practice strike in the pouring rain to confront a workplace violence crisis fueled by low wages and chronic short-staffing. One year later, workers achieved major improvements for staff and patients alike:

Wage increases: Nearly every striking worker now earns at least \$20 an hour, including service and maintenance workers whose starting wage was \$15.53 when the strike began. Workers have received wage increases ranging from \$3 to \$8 an hour. All employees have already received two raises, with some receiving two additional increases based on seniority.

Workplace violence: Incidents of workplace violence have dropped significantly in comparison to the same time frame last year. From January to March, 2026, there were 30 reported workplace violence incidents; in comparison there were 112 reported workplace violence incidents from January to March, 2025, a 73% decrease. (In 2022, there was 168 workplace violence incidents; 2023 - 205; and 2024 - 238)

Reduced turnover: In 2024, the annual turnover rate was 37%. In comparison, based on the average monthly rate of employee exits since the strike ended, the projected annual turnover rate will be 17%.

Training and education: Workers will soon begin enrolling for educational benefits through the SEIU 1199NE Training and Education Fund that includes tuition reimbursement, nurse loan repayment plan and semester and non-semester-based healthcare courses.

"Before the strike, people felt unsafe, morale was extremely low and it felt like we had lost our way. Now, almost one year later, it feels like we now have a clearer sense of direction and stability, which helps create a workplace with a solid

foundation for the next generation of caregivers. There is real value in having a workforce that is committed to standing up for one another and for the quality of care our patients receive. This has improved morale and brought new staff in the door who can continue building on our progress."

Ian Lacombe, Registered Nurse, LAC (ER)

"Coming out of the strike, we formed the Training and Education Committee as an effort between frontline workers, union representatives and management to consolidate existing educational benefits under the union's Training and Education fund. Over several weeks, we worked together to negotiate an agreement outlining the structure of the benefits, including student loan repayment, tuition reimbursement, coverage for continuing education units (CEUs), conferences, and professional development opportunities. It feels good to work together to create something tangible that benefits staff and our patients."

John Cabral, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) and Licensed Substance Abuse Counselor (LCDP) in D3, a dual diagnosis and detox unit.

SEIU 1199NE represents over 800 positions at Butler Hospital including dietary staff, registered nurses, mental health workers, clerical, environmental service, and more. On April 25, 2025 91% of the entire workforce of frontline staff at Butler Hospital voted to authorize the strike citing management's refusal to address the workplace violence crisis and below market value-wages. After three long months that included the loss of health insurance, threats to permanently replace workers' positions and marathon bargaining sessions, workers were finally able to settle a fair contract that 99% of participating workers to ratify on August 19, 2025. To commemorate the historic strike, workers planted a purple and yellow pollinator garden, a symbolic oak tree and worked in tandem with the Blackstone Parks Conservancy to restore the soil and replant the grassy area on Blackstone Boulevard.

"As a workforce and union, we certainly felt a sense of solidarity before the strike but our shared experience made it even stronger. Now months later, our sense of unity remains - we feel proud of what we have accomplished for ourselves, our patients and each other. Despite the challenges, staff feel much more confident in the way they have to make Butler the premiere provider of care. We know there is still more work to do, and we will never stop advocating for our patients and those of us who have committed to giving them the care they deserve."

Butler caregivers planned to hold an anniversary celebration this Friday, May 15, 2026 but have rescheduled the event to the following Friday, May 22 from 11AM - 5:30PM.

MEDIA CONTACT

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ABOUT SEIU 1199NE

District 1199 SEIU New England represents 29,000 health care and service workers in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Southeastern Massachusetts. In Rhode Island, 1199 SEIU NE represents almost 5,000 members. 1199 SEIU NE is affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) - a union of over 2 million members across the United States, Puerto Rico and Canada. SEIU has been a national leader in pushing the growing Fight for \$15 and a Union movement.