



March 4, 2021

The Honorable Charles D. Baker  
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

Mark Bernard  
Executive Director

Charles C. Owen, Jr.  
President

Chris "Tiger" Stockbridge  
Vice President

Nancy Silva  
Recording Secretary

Gerry Mills  
Treasurer

Jack Wagner  
Sgt. at Arms

Dear Governor Baker:

Last July, I wrote to you to express our union's appreciation for your leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic and your recognition of the contributions and sacrifices made by our more than 6,500 men and women working in state human services facilities. At the time, I was writing to request that you resume the short-term hazard pay stipends or 'differentials' provided to these direct care workers for the brief period of April 12 – June 20.

Unfortunately, your administration refused to resume the hazard pay, despite the fact that our direct care workers have continued to report faithfully to work and place themselves and their families at an extremely high risk for infection.

While the decision against resuming hazard pay was extremely disappointing, I write today to express a far greater concern, which is the current position taken by your state contract negotiation team that there is no money available to offer any pay increases in the next contract.

While your negotiation team has refrained to date from formalizing their position, statements made in initial contract discussions have been clear. Their intent is to ask us to agree to a new contract that does not include any increases in pay. This, of course, is unacceptable for a number of reasons.

As I am sure you know, these front-line and often overlooked and undervalued workers who served in both hospital and group home settings, have paid a heavy price for their dedication and bravery over the past year. According to data released to the public at our union's request, more than 900 state human services workers have been infected with the virus to date. We may never know how many of their family members were in turn infected as a result, but I think it's fair to assume that infection numbers among their family members is significant as well.

Because so many direct care workers were infected, those who remained working in places like Tewksbury Hospital were mandated to work multiple 16-hour shifts in a single week. Many did so within over-crowded COVID-19 wards with access to just one mask for the entire shift. In my opinion, their incredible contributions should forever re-define what it means to be an essential public-sector worker.

As such, asking these workers to forgo pay increases in the next contract is shameful.

Your negotiators' current position, combined with the fact that we recently learned the state is spending an exorbitant amount of money on contract workers to deliver direct care, is causing worker moral to deteriorate rapidly. While we are still reviewing volumes of information related to this ongoing use of contract workers in state human services facilities, our members already know these contract employees are receiving a higher hourly rate than many state employees. As I'm sure you can imagine, this has many questioning why they would continue working in such a difficult and dangerous job for subpar compensation.

In addition, the state's true financial position contradicts the claims of your negotiators that the state does not have the resources to fund pay increases.

As you know, January 2021 revenues far exceeded projections, coming in at \$429 million above the department of revenue's benchmark for the month, which had already been increased by \$180 million from an earlier estimate. February was also a strong month with the state bringing in nearly \$1.9 billion in revenue – a full \$372 million or 24.8 percent over projections.

In addition to these very promising revenue numbers, the commonwealth is also on the cusp of receiving billions in largely-unrestricted federal aid as part of the next COVID relief legislation. In our opinion, this pending federal aid, combined with the unexpected surge in tax revenue, directly and unequivocally refutes any claim by your negotiation team that pay increases are unaffordable.

In closing, I want you to know that despite the current position of your contract negotiation team, we continue to attempt to negotiate in good faith and continue to put forth what we believe are creative ideas to provide our members with a level of pay commensurate with the work they do. This includes, but is not limited to, proposing a flat hourly increase as opposed to a percentage increase, which would help retain workers at the lower end of the pay scale and help attract new workers to a career in state service. This would also help the state decrease, and perhaps even eliminate, its growing reliance on costly contract workers.

In short, we are doing our part at the negotiating table but we need your representatives at the other side of the table to do their part. We believe that will only happen with your direct intervention.

As such, I respectfully urge you to direct your negotiation team to cease attempts to ask us to agree to a new contract without pay increases and further direct them to work with us to reach an agreement that provides these skilled and courageous workers with the compensation they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you or a member of your staff have any questions or would like to discuss this issue further please do not hesitate to contact me at 617-367-6015.

Sincerely,



Mark Bernard  
Executive Director