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Dear Speaker Robert Rivas:

I've led unions into contract negotiations with Kaiser Permanente for over 30 years, and I've never seen Kaiser publish anything more dishonest than what it paid to print today in newspapers across Southern California.

Kaiser's chronic failure to adequately staff its mental health clinics and provide timely care is not up for debate. The state of California investigated Kaiser's mental health system just last year and [fined it a record \\$50 million](#).

Our contract proposals are a necessary starting point for Kaiser to finally fix its mental health system. We're not proposing anything that Kaiser hasn't already agreed to in Northern California. That's why it's so troubling that instead of negotiating in good faith around the proposals we've put forward here in Southern California, Kaiser is paying tens of thousands of dollars to print lies about them.

Here is some necessary fact-checking:

Kaiser's Claim: Currently our therapists have about 25% of their work time available for record keeping, planning, administrative tasks, and meetings.

Reality: Right now, full-time Kaiser therapists in Southern California get between 2 to 4 hours a week of their time for patient care work that can't be done during appointments. That's less than 10 percent. We're proposing that Kaiser guarantee 7 hours a week (17.5 percent of their work time for these tasks). That's the exact same amount of time that Kaiser agreed to give therapists in Northern California. No one gets 25 percent of their time not to see patients, and no one has asked for it.

Kaiser's Claim: NUHW is proposing that full-time therapists decrease time spent seeing patients and increase their time away from direct patient care by nearly 50% or at least 19 hours a week.

Reality: We're asking Kaiser to guarantee full-time therapists 7 hours a week for critical patient care duties like preparing for appointments, devising treatment plans, contacting social service agencies and calling back patients. That's the same as what Kaiser has agreed to in Northern California. No one is asking for an additional 19 hours per week.

Kaiser's Claim: NUHW has said our therapists do not receive a retirement pension. This is simply not true. Our therapists in Southern California participate in a generous defined contribution pension plan.

Reality: Kaiser officials are clearly implying that all of its mental health professionals get a pension when they know that is flat out false. Kaiser eliminated pensions for all mental health professionals in Southern California hired after 2014. Currently, more than 70 percent of these workers do NOT have pensions. That isn't just bad for the workers. Kaiser data shows that mental health professionals without pensions are twice as likely to leave Kaiser than those with pensions. Kaiser says it's prioritizing behavioral health care, yet nearly everyone Kaiser hires, including doctors, clerks, medical technicians, janitors and executives, will receive a pension, but not mental health professionals.

Kaiser Claim: Today our Southern California therapists make on average 18% more than their peers earn in other organizations.

Reality: Kaiser has refused to show us this comparison. But we do have data showing that Kaiser pays its psychiatric nurses less than other RNs and pays its mental health therapists up to 40 percent less than therapists who work for Kaiser on the medical side including respiratory therapists, occupational therapists and radiation therapists.

Kaiser Claim: We have invested more than \$1 billion since 2020 to expand our mental health capabilities in California – with more therapists, more resources, and shorter wait times.

Reality: When we surveyed our therapists this year, more than twice as many of them said appointment wait times had increased over the past year than said wait times had decreased. And 58 percent said they still couldn't see patients within two weeks of their last appointment as required under state law.

Kaiser has not produced a shred of documentation to support its claims because they are baseless. Kaiser hasn't allowed any executive to be interviewed about the strike because Kaiser's arguments are untrue and indefensible.

These contract negotiations should be an opportunity for us to help Kaiser follow the law and meet its obligation to the state to transform its mental healthcare system. We've started on that road in Northern California where Kaiser staffs 40 percent more therapists than in Southern California (despite having 200,000 fewer Kaiser members), and those therapists get twice as much time to meet the needs of their patients.

Unfortunately in Southern California, the only thing Kaiser management has brought to the table is cynicism. It started early when Kaiser officials refused to start negotiating until July, and it continued this week when Kaiser invited us back to bargaining only to propose nothing new and ended the session early.

I know there's a fair agreement to be reached because we already reached it two years ago with Kaiser in Northern California — thanks in part to support from local elected officials. I ask that you sign our [equity platform](#) and reach out to Kaiser to make it clear you support the striking mental health professionals. Please also see our [fact sheet](#) about the strike. I'll be happy to connect you with an organizer to answer any questions about it.

Sincerely,



Sal Rosselli, President Emeritus
National Union of Healthcare Workers