

State mediators called on as Kaiser strike enters 7th week

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SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (KRON) – San Francisco leaders are calling for an end to the ongoing strike by Kaiser Permanente mental health care workers.

They've been on the picket line for seven weeks and they believe its affecting public health. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors spent more than two-and-a-half hours Tuesday night listening to the concerns of Kaiser's mental health workers.

Many of the people who spoke at the meeting are urging the supervisors to do something to get the mental health care workers off the picket lines and back into their offices. Some of the supervisors are now calling on Governor Gavin Newsom to get involved.

Walton is one of the people who spoke on Tuesday and he said, "I just want to say to Kaiser that just because you're a giant does not mean you cannot be knocked down."

During a hearing at their board meeting on Tuesday, many San Francisco supervisors spoke out in support of the more than 2,000 Kaiser mental health therapists currently on strike. The therapists are demanding that Kaiser fully staff its clinics and end dangerously long wait times for therapy.

"At one point early this year the number of patients I myself, alone, am responsible for is over 180. That's 180 active patients and I have a little less than 30 appointments a week." This clinical psychologist says he has worked at Kaiser for 21 years. Because of current circumstances, he can only see his patients every five to six weeks and he says that long of a wait could be deadly.

Several people shared stories of loved ones taking their own life while waiting for the opportunity to see a therapist. Therapists also say that they're seeing people's mental health issues get more serious because they can't get the treatment they need in a timely manner.

Therapists say they want to come to a resolution with Kaiser to end the strike. Kaiser representatives were invited to the board of supervisors meeting but no one showed up.

The research and political director for the national union of healthcare workers says he's concerned with how Kaiser is handling the strike from a patient's perspective.

"We've learned the kaiser has been contacting patients to schedule appointments with clinicians who they know very well are on strike with no anticipated day of return."

Supervisor Hilary Ronen says she plans to write up a resolution for next week's meeting demanding Governor Newsom gets involved. Other supervisors want to push to get Kaiser representatives at their next meeting on the topic.