



National Association of Social Workers - California Chapter

Bernard J. Tyson, Chairman and CEO
1 Kaiser Plaza
Kaiser Permanente
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Mr. Tyson

The National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter is deeply concerned about on-going negotiations between Kaiser Permanente and the 4,000 licensed mental health clinicians and healthcare professionals represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers. We support our Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) and their union in these negotiations.

I am disappointed that Kaiser has not yet solved the well-documented problems affecting its mental health services. It has been more than five years since the Department of Managed Health Care fined Kaiser \$4 million for committing multiple mental health violations. Nonetheless, I understand that Kaiser remains under a state-issued "cease and desist" order and is subject to a state-ordered monitoring program scheduled to remain in place until 2020. Meanwhile, mental health therapists report that many clinics are vastly understaffed and that patients with conditions such as depression and bipolar disorder often wait one and two months between treatment appointments.

Furthermore, I am disappointed that despite months of bargaining and Kaiser's stated desire to improve its relationship with its mental health clinicians, there is still no contract. In the interest of fairness and to avoid the damaging consequences of a strike, I urge you to work with NUHW to reach a fair contract that prioritizes improved staffing levels and quality care.

Kaiser plays a vital role in California's mental health delivery system as our state's largest HMO and its largest private-sector provider of mental health services. A number of important developments signals the need for increased investment in our society's mental health services. A 2018 study by the California Health Care Foundation found that nearly two-thirds of adults with a mental illness do not receive treatment. Meanwhile, our society struggles with the opioid crisis, the vast numbers of people with mental illness who live on our streets, and the ongoing societal stigma attached to mental illness. As a national leader in the healthcare industry, I urge Kaiser to use its vast resources, including \$9.8 billion in net income since 2016, to help accomplish full mental health parity.

Just as Kaiser has successfully led innovations in other aspects of our healthcare system, I hope Kaiser can work with NUHW to become a leader in mental health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Gonzales".

Rebecca Gonzales
Director of Government Relations, NASW-CA