

Press Release

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Welfare & Pension Inc. Workers Go on Strike

Mercer Island, WA – The workers who administer health and pension benefits for thousands of union members in the Pacific Northwest are going on strike. After 11 months of negotiations and 7 months without a contract, members of the Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 8 who work at Welfare & Pension Administration Services, Inc. voted to go out on strike. Union supporters are holding a kick off rally on **Wednesday, August 23 at 12:00pm** in front of the Welfare & Pension Inc. offices at 7525 SE 24th St, Mercer Island.

The main issues the workers are fighting for are seniority rights, a cap on medical premium cost share, and reestablishing their retirement after losing their pension benefit last year.

“ In every negotiation concessions are to be expected, but WPAS has proposed take-ways to the extent of going from a 48 page contract to approximately 28 pages. A major takeaway is their proposal to eliminate seniority rights across the board, even for layoffs,” said Amanda Montoya, lead negotiator for OPEIU Local 8.

The day of the contract and strike votes, the WPAS distributed a memo that read: “...the major roadblock is language, with seniority being the major issue, which WPAS believes will have very little impact upon employees but will help WPAS be more competitive in our highly competitive environment.”

“When employees read that memo, they were offended because it shows that their employer does not understand the value of what seniority means to their employees,” Montoya said. “It was no surprise that employees voted down the contract and said ‘YES’ to strike.”

Welfare and Pension Administrative Service (WPAS), which employs 95 union employees, is now a private for profit corporation. WPAS was originally established by labor unions as a non-profit organization to administer health and pension benefits for union negotiated plans, and their employees have had a union contract since 1973. The company manages health and pension trusts primarily for labor unions, monitoring eligibility, adjusting and paying claims.

OPEIU Local 8 members at Welfare & Pension Inc. went on strike in 1988 over one of the same issues they’re fighting for today – maintenance of benefits.

For more information, visit the OPEIU 8 website at www.opeiu8.org.