

HOSPITAL WORKERS RALLY FOR 'RESPECT'

PROTESTS HELD OVER CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

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The people on the front lines of the pandemic took a stand outside local hospitals over what they say is a lack of respect around ongoing contract negotiations.

On Friday (July 23), healthcare workers rallied outside of hospitals in Burlington, Oakville, and Milton as part of a province-wide action that will see similar actions at 55 different facilities throughout the summer. The protesters held signs that read, "Respect us, protect us, pay

us,' and called on the provincial government to not limit wage increases or go forward with contract concessions.

Provincial bargaining for nearly 70,000 registered practical nurses, personal support workers, clerical, cleaning, maintenance, dietary and other staff who are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and SEIU Healthcare began in June.

Lorrie Kennedy, president of CUPE Local 815, said the pandemic has been difficult for their members.

"We are so short-staffed. Nurses are walking away from their careers just because they can't handle what's going on with the pandemic - how we were treated. Understand fully, during the pandemic not



Graham Paine/Metroland

CUPE local 815 president Lorrie Kennedy speaks at a hospital workers rally at Milton District Hospital while joined by local healthcare workers.

one person didn't do what they were told to do," said Kennedy.

In 2019, the province passed Bill 124, which limits wage increases for a number of healthcare workers to a maximum of one per-cent for three years. Opponents of Bill 124

have said it interferes with their right to bargain and the one per cent increase is less than inflation.

Kennedy argued that this has occurred during a particularly stressful time in their profession where the government has regularly labelled them as he-

roes.

"Everyone is fatigued, we all are, everyone is. But don't forget healthcare hasn't stopped since day one. It's very stressful, because if you think in your own life if you think how you handled it we're just people. Just because we

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- Lorrie Kennedy, president of CUPE Local 815

work here doesn't mean we had this super power to understand everything and people are stressed. They're second guessing their careers," said Kennedy.

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