



The Coalition of Red Cross Unions

April 18, 2022

Dr. Robert M. Califf, MD
Commissioner
United States Food and Drug Agency
1093 New Hampshire Blvd
Silver Spring, Maryland
20993

Dear Dr. Woodcock,

The ten national unions that make up the Coalition of Red Cross Unions (“Union Coalition”) represent 3,000 American Red Cross workers on the frontlines of our nation’s blood supply. Across the country, from California to Maine, these workers collect, process, and deliver lifesaving blood products to hospitals and the Armed Services.

We are asking that the FDA call upon the American Red Cross to settle a fair contract with the Union Coalition on behalf of these essential workers, at this time of crisis in the US workforce that makes recruitment and retention particularly vital in order to ensure the ongoing supply of excellent, life-saving products our members deliver across the nation every day.

BACKGROUND:

These essential workers and their families were at risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to the nature of the work, particularly prior to the COVID-19 vaccine, yet still worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic, including without proper PPE during the first devastating months.

Indeed, many were exposed to COVID-19 on the job and needed to quarantine, sometimes multiple times, which used up all their paid time off (PTO) or even caused some of these workers to go without pay during two-week quarantines, and sometimes multiple quarantines throughout the pandemic – an incredible hardship for low wage hourly workers, many of whom live paycheck to paycheck for their basic needs. Many lost multiple weeks of pay due to COVID-19 exposures at work.

Some of these workers of course also got sick, some were hospitalized, and at least one died from the virus in 2020.

CURRENT SITUATION:

Now, nearly two years into the pandemic and at a time of crisis in the US workforce, the American Red Cross is facing a workforce shortage. They have a turnover rate of over 50% in many regions (voluntary, annualized turnover, meaning workers who resigned) and over 100% in several, as well as recruiting challenges.



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From surveying our members, we have found significant feelings among this workforce that lead to dissatisfaction include:

- feeling like they are not paid what they deserve / wages are too low / it is hard to make ends meet;
- feeling that they do not have enough staff on each shift to do their jobs well, leading to feelings of stress, overwork, and concern about the possibility of errors;
- working conditions during the pandemic, particularly regarding the need to quarantine without pay and use their earned PTO for work exposure quarantines;
- concern about access to quality, affordable healthcare.

We believe that the American Red Cross has been too slow to adequately address this, even at the bargaining table where we stand ready to work together to solve these issues, we have shared our member survey findings, and have presented proposals that we know offer solutions to recruitment, retention, and immediate shift/blood drive staffing problems.

We are additionally concerned that the American Red Cross is considering action that would indeed exacerbate the workforce problem by considering an increase in deductible and out-of-pocket health insurance costs for these already struggling workers.

NEXT STEP:

The Coalition of Red Cross Unions and the American Red Cross will meet again at the bargaining table the week of April 18, 2022. Our hope is for the American Red Cross to be better prepared to settle a contract no later than May 31, 2022 that provides their employees a living wage, affordable quality healthcare, and adequate working conditions in order to mitigate the existing feelings of stress, concern, and dissatisfaction that their employees have.

We are asking the FDA to immediately call upon the American Red Cross to settle a fair contract with the Coalition of Red Cross Unions to address these issues. The nation benefits by ensuring that the ongoing supply of excellent, life-saving products these workers deliver every day continue.

Sincerely,

Jon Haines, Lead Bargainer, AFSCME

Shauneequa Davis, Co-Lead Bargainer, SEIU

Cindy Dine, Lead Bargainer, OPEIU

Darryl Ford, Lead Bargainer, USW

Judy Merkowski, Lead Bargainer AFT



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