

PRESS RELEASE

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Worker's With the "Blues" In Buffalo Continue their Fight to Knockout the Lockout!

(Buffalo, NY) – Despite the continuous rain showers and bone chilling temperatures on May 3, 2011, the members of Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 212 continued to rally in protest against the lockout action taken by HealthNow New York, Inc. - Blue Cross Blue Shield. Workers picketed the corporate headquarters located in downtown Buffalo.

Later the same day more than 300 of the workers locked out by the "Blues" showed up at a voluntary meeting called by OPEIU leadership to discuss the apparent long-term plans, financial support and government services that may be available under Federal and State programs. Information was provided by the United Way of both Erie and Niagara County, the New York State Department of Labor as well as unemployment support from Collins & Brown LLC. Other unions have also offered to help locked out workers.

"Our members recognize that the attack on working families and the middle class is in full swing and our management has joined the battle to steamroll over union members to get whatever they want, but our members refuse to accept having our jobs outsourced and dehumanized, so we will stand strong in protest of this lockout," said Local 212 President Caroline Muszynski. "If we aren't working and being paid, we lose our ability to pay our bills and provide for our families. If we don't have money to spend we can't help our local businesses and neighbors keep their jobs, so everyone loses," she continued.

Union leaders were advised that more than 50 workers had not received paychecks in the mail for work already performed for the week ending April 22. These checks would normally be received on April 29. The remaining workers, who receive direct deposit payments, are unable to determine if they were properly paid because the company has failed to provide them with pay stubs. The locked out workers do not have access to their individual computerized pay records, which are housed in the company's internal system.

"It is difficult to believe that this company is incapable of providing our members with pay checks and an accurate accounting of an individual's pay record, which means one of two things, either the company is really poor at record keeping or they are deliberately withholding this pay and information," said Local 212 Business Representative Deana Fox.

Despite that BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York assured its customers last Tuesday that business would continue as usual even though the company locked out 390 of its workers at its downtown office after negotiations failed, some plan members have advised union officials that their calls are not being answered or that they are being told that they will be contacted at a later date to process a claim.

Despite previous claims made by the company that they were willing to continue bargaining, no firm dates have been set. Fox says that the company has indicated they are available on May 16 for bargaining, but are noncommittal about earlier dates. The union is committed to bargaining at anytime on any date.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement covering 400 workers represented by Local 212 working at HealthNow NY Inc. expired at 11:59 p.m. on April 25, 2011. The parties had been meeting to negotiate a successor agreement since February. Local 212 members provide customer service, process claims, reproduce documents and do other clerical and support work.