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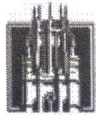
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## MILWAUKEE NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS SERVICE

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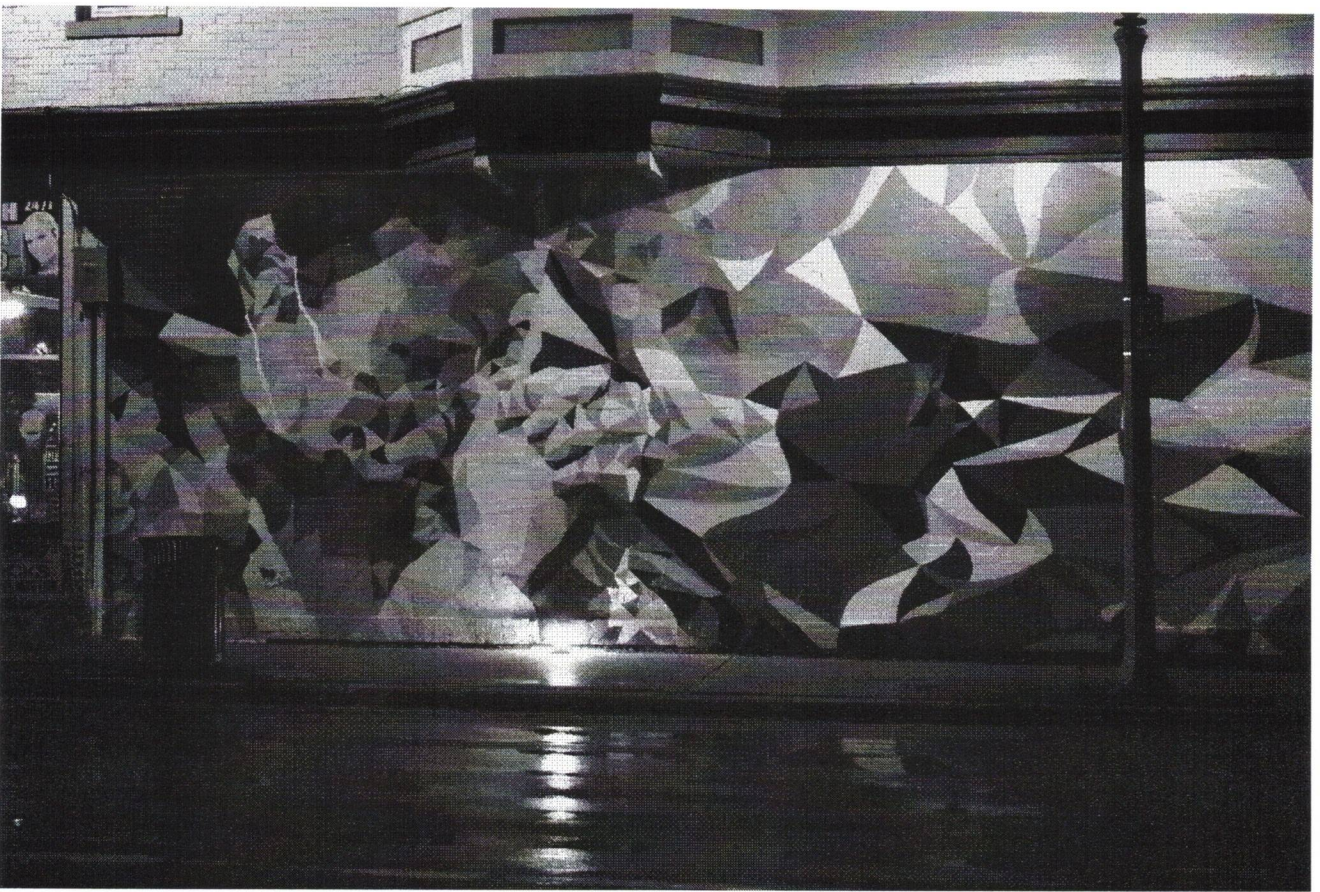
**DIEDERICH**  
College of Communication

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

Thursday, May 14, 2020

### **OPINION: An open letter to healthcare executives: You hold the power to keep your employees safe and paid. Do better.**

May 12, 2020 by **Jamie Lucas, Jeff Weber & Nate Gilliam** — **1 Comment**



Artist Mauricio Ramirez created this mural on the corner of South Sixth Street and West Lincoln Avenue to honor frontline workers and medical professionals. (Photo by Adam Carr)

*Editor's note: Have something on your mind? "Community Voices" is the place to let Milwaukee hear what you have to say. To be considered, we need your name, email address and phone number for verification. Please email your submissions to [info@milwaukeeenns.org](mailto:info@milwaukeeenns.org).*



*Jamie Lucas is executive director of Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (WFNHP); Jeff Weber is president of WFNHP; and Nate Gilliam is lead organizer of WFNHP.*



Last month, leaders of Milwaukee-area health care corporations **wrote a letter** to the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service readership called "We need your help to keep our caregivers safe: A letter to our community about COVID-19." This piece, while perhaps well-intentioned, was offensive, disrespectful and wholly inappropriate. This week is Nurses Week, and the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals has a message about what nurses and our community really need.



(Lucas,  
Weber and  
Gilliam)

The truth is, CEOs and executives who signed this letter: Your employees need *your* help to stay safe. **And the entire Milwaukee community needs *you* to do better to keep us all safe.**

There are housekeepers in Ascension hospitals sent in to clean the rooms of COVID patients without N95 masks. There are nurses in Advocate Aurora rationing masks for over a month. There are lab techs at Froedtert, working for the for-profit Wisconsin Diagnostic Laboratories, working this entire pandemic without any hazard pay and have taken losses on their paycheck through no fault of their own. If we're all in this together, as you say, prove it to your employees first before coming to ask help from a community who needs support. Then, give more to those who need it. After that, your request for help will mean something so much more.



Here's another truth: These health care corporations are pretending like everything will be fine as long as we all follow certain guidelines. The reality is, none of these corporations have done enough to keep their own employees safe. While nurses and doctors are reusing N95 masks and working in incredibly dangerous conditions, these corporations and their executives are sitting on billions of dollars.

That's not hyperbole. Looking at only Advocate Aurora, Ascension, and Froedtert – just three of the 13 healthcare corporations signed onto this letter – there are *billions of dollars* in these so-called "not-for-profit" health care corporations that could and should be reprioritized to provide Milwaukee's frontline caregivers with proper protective gear, hazard pay, no-fault sick leave, no-cost medical coverage and pay continuation if they're furloughed. There is not a single employee in any of those three systems who have all five of those basic protections — protections that would be infinitely more helpful than "thank you" or calling them "heroes." Heroes deserve action, not just words.

A significant portion of these billions are required by law to be reinvested into the communities they serve because they're all not-for-profit corporations, which means they do not most pay local, state or federal taxes. Advocate Aurora, Ascension and Froedtert have these tax statuses so that, in theory, they can focus their resources on providing health care and do good within the communities they serve. Whereas the rest of us might think this means they provide a significant amount of "free or low-cost health care," they do a pitiful amount – roughly 2.49% of Ascension's national operating revenue went to community benefits in 2018. There's no real accountability on how they give back to our community or how much care they provide.

At a time when all of us need to do something to stop the spread and devastation of this virus, those who have the most resources need to do more. If people do not have the means to stay safer at home, it is unreasonable and disrespectful to tell them to stay home to help your employees. We all should be doing everything we can right now, which is why our union, the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, **sent Advocate Aurora, Ascension and Froedtert a request for partnership** that would have granted paid leave, hazard pay, childcare coverage and medical coverage for all frontline health care workers in their direct employment.

We requested partnership to lobby the state and federal government for monthly stipends and a moratorium on mortgage and rent payments so people could stay in their homes safely and give our society a chance to recover.

None of these healthcare corporations answered this call to action in full. None.

Some have taken tepid half-measures to provide *some* people *some* additional pay — Advocate Aurora and Froedtert, until the latter took it away suddenly for reasons that are unclear. Ascension even had the gall to ask for donations from individual people to help pay for childcare for their own employees. As if they couldn't afford it on their own!

Ascension, headquartered in St. Louis, paid its CEO \$59.1 million between 2014 and 2017, according to Forbes. Advocate Aurora established a *supplemental* retirement plan for approximately 15 executives in 2017 at the cost of over 1 million dollars – over a million bucks for a few people who already made several hundred thousand dollars per year and already presumably had a retirement account. Froedtert reported \$961 million in assets in tax filings for 2017, yet they cut differential pay for certain nurses in 2019. Those are outrageous amounts of money for already wealthy people to be paid, and when juxtaposed against what they're paying people who are actually on the front lines, it's unfathomably inhumane. Clearly, there is money. Please put it back into our community.

Our union is a founding member of the community-led St. Joe's Accountability Coalition (SJAC). We advocate for an expansion of health care services on Milwaukee's North Side. The coalition believes **medical redlining** is the reason for disparate impacts of negative health outcomes, as hospital systems have more services in more affluent white parts of the state, and fewer services in areas where people of color live. This pandemic exacerbates that problem, and again these hospital systems can do more, because they have the resources.

Looking specifically at the neighborhoods served by the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service, Ascension employs many people in the neighborhoods around St. Joe's. Collectively, these three corporations employ thousands of people in Milwaukee. The standards of how much they are paid, what kind of health insurance they are offered, and how families of employees are cared for can literally set the standard of living and employment in this city and county.

We implore you, executives of these three systems: look within at your own practices, do better and provide your employees with what they actually need. If you are a part of this community as much your ads and sponsorships of our sports teams try to convince us, then please lead by example and show up for our community in a real way when we all need it most.

Instead of asking people who can't stay home to stay home, *this* is how you should first support these dedicated, skilled, and compassionate caregivers – the nurses and housekeepers, respiratory therapists and nursing assistants, doctors and food service workers, laboratory technologists and nurse practitioners and everyone else working in a health care facility.

They deserve better. After all, they are heroes, right?

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## Comments

1.



**Steve Baldwin says**

**MAY 13, 2020 AT 7:21 AM**

Is there a middle ground here? How about the following:

Proper protective gear: Yes, essential.

Hazard pay: With proper protective gear, training, good supervision and other reasonable measures, jobs should be much less hazardous.

No-fault sick leave, no-cost medical coverage and pay continuation if they're furloughed:  
Who can afford all this? Here's another plan:

Sick Leave: Yes, some is essential.

Medical coverage: Plans in which the out-of-pocket maximums scale progressively with pay level.

Furlough: Minimum stand-by pay that, again, scales progressively with pay level.

Unions, please remember that ordinary people have to pay for all this stuff, and currently, we are not competitive on a world level when it comes to providing basic care.

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### **OPINION: 'We need your help to keep our caregivers safe': A letter to our community about COVID-19**

April 17, 2020 by **Milwaukee area health care providers** — [Leave a Comment](#)



Artist Mauricio Ramirez created this mural honoring frontline workers and medical professionals on the corner of South Sixth Street and Lincoln Avenue. (Photo by Adam Carr)

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***Leaders of Milwaukee's health care providers write a letter to the community with suggestions on how everyone can help in their response to COVID-19.***



We are here for you. We are together. We need your help.

We are the health care providers in your community who are working together every day, every hour, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic that is sweeping our nation. We want you to know that along with emergency responders, public health agencies and government leaders, we are part of the community-wide effort to slow the spread of the virus. Our teams are on the front lines of caring for those afflicted.

Right now, we need your help to keep our caregivers safe.



They — along with food service workers, cleaning staff, transporters and other front-line staff — selflessly show up each day to care for and serve our patients. You can keep them safe by continuing to stay home, keep social distances and wash your hands. Simple to say, sometimes not so easy to do, and absolutely lifesaving.

Our region's hospitals and community health centers stand united against this pandemic to provide the best possible care under extraordinary circumstances. Despite limited access to testing and prevention supplies, we are confident in our preparedness, planning and protocols, as well as the guidance from federal and state public health agencies. Moreover, our clinical leaders collaborate daily to respond to, and plan for the ever-changing needs of our patients, staff and community.

The days ahead will test our community's strength, our resources and our spirit. But, with your help, we will prevail. As health care providers, we will continue to work together to care for those who need us most, and we will honor the trust you place in us for your health, and the health of our community.

*Jim Skogsbergh, CEO*

**Advocate Aurora Health**

*Bernie Sherry, Ministry Market Executive*

**Ascension Wisconsin**

*Peggy Troy, CEO*

**Children's Wisconsin**

*Cathy Jacobson, CEO*

**Froedtert Health**

*Lyle Ignace MD, CEO*

**Gerald L. Ignace Indian Health Center**

*Mary Ouimet, CEO*

**Kenosha Community Health Center**

*John Raymond MD, President*

**Medical College of Wisconsin**

*Joy Tapper, Executive Director*  
**Milwaukee Health Care Partnership**

*Tito Izard MD, CEO*  
**Milwaukee Health Services, Inc.**

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**Outreach Community Health Centers**

*Jenni Sevenich, CEO*  
**Progressive Community Health Centers**

*Susan Edwards, CEO*  
**ProHealth Care**

*Julie Schuller MD, CEO*  
**Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers**

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