



MEDIA RELEASE

Ontario Nurses' Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Conciliation Fails: Chatham-Kent Public Health Nurses Hold Strike Vote

TORONTO – The 42 public health nurses in the Municipality of Chatham-Kent continue to work without a new contract following the failure of a conciliation session. The nurses, members of Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) Local 35, are preparing to strike following a strike vote on February 6, 2008, but remain hopeful that a mediation session tentatively scheduled on the day before the nurses are in a legal strike position will be successful in reaching an agreement.

"No nurse wants to leave his or her patients vulnerable and without care," notes ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud, RN. "A strike is the last, last resort. But our members have been hitting a stone wall in negotiations with the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, and Municipality of Chatham-Kent public health nurses continue to be paid between five and 10 per cent less than nurses in other provincial health units. This inequity can't continue, as the nursing shortage worsens and recruitment and retention of nurses becomes more difficult across the province, especially in Chatham-Kent."

Local 35 members provide public health services in the communities across the entire Municipality of Chatham-Kent, including health education and promotion for families with new babies, outbreak protection for the community including flu and hepatitis vaccine clinics, and provide sexual health clinics and education for Chatham-Kent's 110,000 residents.

In addition to the inequity in wages, the nurses have been involved in an ongoing pay equity dispute for more than two years. They are also seeking improvements to stand-by premiums which have not been negotiated for more than 10 years. The Municipality intends to implement new policies for emergency preparedness and pandemic planning that will see the nurses be on-call 24 hours per day and seven days per week. The nurses will be the Municipality's first line of defense in such emergencies and they deserve to be paid comparably with other public health nurses in the area for their time and community health expertise. The employer has also proposed significant benefit reductions for the most senior public health nurses.

The last contract for these nurses expired December 31, 2006; however, they have not had a pay increase since January 1, 2004.

ONA is the union representing 53,000 front-line registered nurses and allied health professionals working in Ontario hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community and industry.

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