

**Union** ★  
**Update**

**OPEIU**  
Local



*For Local 8 Members at Crisis Connections*

*September 23, 2021*

**We had contract negotiations yesterday and will meet again with Management tomorrow on Friday the 24th.**

### **Waived Breaks**

Any changes to Crisis Connections' waived break policy and waived break bonus need to be bargained as part of our first contract. To continue waiving your breaks for the duration of contract negotiations, you must complete the new Meal Period Waiver that staff have been instructed to sign and return to HR by 09/27/21.

Yesterday, Crisis Connections presented a proposal to eliminate waived breaks and the waived break bonus. Notably, Management has not shared any tangible plan to address the gaps in coverage this would cause on already improperly staffed lines. Please know, the Bargaining Team understands this change would have significant financial implications for Employees and we intend to prioritize preserving waived breaks for those who want/need them.

### **Staffing**

We proposed a short staffing differential at our last bargaining session on September 10th. Yesterday, management chose to respond by having their lawyer present data to "show why [they] don't think we are understaffed."

CC cited the Crisis Lines' access rates as proof of sufficient staffing levels, claiming "if we were understaffed, we would see a dip in these numbers." This assertion fails to consider how Employees have been forced to accommodate critically low-staffing levels through double-desking and service rationing to ensure we continue to meet the metrics outlined in our contracts. It also fails to acknowledge that staffing is a problem across many roles and departments at the agency.

Using similarly faulty logic, Management also concluded that steady call volumes on the professional lines for the King County Crisis Department so far in 2021 meant employees couldn't be experiencing an increased workload. This, of course, does not take into account that this consistently high number of calls is being handled by fewer and fewer remaining staff. Again, these numbers in no way capture the workload of Crisis Department, 211, WRHL, Warm Line, Teen Link, or Training Department staff.

Management did not provide any information about staff vacancy rates or any data pertaining to any of Crisis Connections' other service lines.

After Management acknowledged an urgent need to fill vacant positions by introducing the Referral Bonus Program, we had been hopeful that they would also be open to working collaboratively with the Union to improve staff retention. We were disappointed that more value was seemingly being placed on cherry-picked data than on the numerous and consistent concerns raised by frontline staff.

While Management repeatedly attempted to reassure us that they take staffing seriously by reiterating their various recruitment efforts, they simultaneously insisted there is an acceptable amount of turnover and normalized unethical staffing levels, stating that "triaging calls is part of the job" since "there is no way to guarantee there will be enough CSC/CIS staff to supervise all acute calls."

Short staffing is unfair to employees and potentially dangerous for callers and the community. It leads to burnout, demoralization, and an endless cycle of staff turnover. We believe the Employer needs to take a multi-pronged approach:

- Work to fill vacant positions (which we've been assured they are doing)
- Recognize and acknowledge staff now with a short-staffing differential
- Find a healthy, safe, and sustainable staffing matrix
- Work to identify and address the underlying issues causing turnover

There is an obvious disconnect between the real lived experiences of staff on the frontline and the perception of work by Management. Please share how short staffing

impacts you and how it impacts the work by emailing your examples and stories to the Union Bargaining Team at [ccbargainingteam@gmail.com](mailto:ccbargainingteam@gmail.com).

## Union Bargaining Team

Sonia Brown, 2-1-1

Elizabeth Duncavage, Crisis Department

Carly Howard, WARM Line

SK Lewis, King County Crisis Line

Geoffrey Mattens, Recovery Help Line

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Valerie Russell, 2-1-1

Stephen Stott, Community Training

Sarah Welch, Crisis Department

Shaun Witcher, Teen Link

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***Please contact your Union Representative, Tara Powell, with any questions, ideas, or concerns at [Tara@opeiu8.org](mailto:Tara@opeiu8.org).***

