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Equality for a safer work environment

Last Monday, about 100 nurses gathered outside of Southside Hospital in Bayshore to demand a fair contract. Nearly 600 nurses in all have been working without job security since February. "We are holding this vigil to demonstrate to the community and the hospital that we are committed to maintaining safe patient-nurse ratios, flextime hours, and a cost of living increase equal to that of other RNs working in the North Shore Long Island Jewish Hospital system," said Virginia Labrasohr, nurse president of the bargaining unit.

The fight for a new contract started in December 2008, but since then despite 22 bargain sessions between the nurses and the hospital administration, no accomplishments have been made. "The administration doesn't give us any explanations, they just say 'because we say so'," said Virginia Meyers, registered nurse and delegate assembly member. According to the group, the hospital cannot expand without the nurses, and are asking supporters to call Southside Hospital CEO, Winiefred Mack, and ask her to "support the nurses and give them a fair contract."

The best contract, they say, would give nurses better shifts, so that there would also be a better nurse-patient ration. The optimal ratio would be six patients to one nurse, in the medical section floor, and two patients to one nurse, in the intensive care unit. "Right now we are seeing as many as 12 patients to one nurse in the medical section floor," said Meyers. According to Meyers, they would like a contract that is similar to other North Shore LIJ hospitals, "we would like equality to the Syosset Hospital," she said. They are also pushing for a better pension plan,

which they say is now at 2006 levels. “As the price of living increases, we need the pension to increase accordingly,” said Meyers. When an attempt was made for comment, on the demands of the nurses, Winiefred Mack was unavailable.

During the two hours vigil, many cars honked, and drivers would scream “Give them what they want.” Speaking about the outpouring of community support Meyers said, "This is a dedicated group of nurses, and Bayshore is a small community." The group has already collected a petition with 2,000 signatures from the residents. The support is also coming from nurses of other hospitals, like St. Vincent's in Manhattan, “Nurses will always hang together,” said Barbara Craine, President of National Federation of Nurses.