

Our ref:

Your ref:

When telephoning please ask for:



UNISON House
Custom House Street
Cardiff
CF10 1AP

Tel: 0800 0 857 857

Web: cymru-wales.unison.org.uk

Email: cymruwales@unison.co.uk

First Minister of Wales
Mark Drakeford
Welsh Government
5th Floor Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA

Sent Via Email

23 December 2022

Dear First Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of tens of thousands of health workers across Wales who are facing the full force of the cost-of-living crisis and a decade of austerity, low pay and poor working conditions.

As you know, most NHS staff were given just a £1,400 wage rise for this year, way short of the inflation-busting increase health unions said was needed to retain staff.

That works out as an increase of just 72p an hour.

It won't prevent staff leaving or encourage the new recruits the NHS so desperately needs.

This will affect everyone from porters to nurses and paramedics to cleaners, midwives, occupational therapists and other NHS staff across Wales and the rest of the UK.

UNISON Cymru/Wales has heard from health workers in Wales being forced to re-mortgage their homes and, in some cases, live off a diet of bread and soup just to survive.

Some have seen their fuel bills almost double and fear they may not be able to heat their home this winter.

This is unacceptable and an immediate solution must be found by the government in Wales to avoid further industrial action as we go into the new year.

More than 90% of UNISON members who took part in our ballot for industrial action over pay and conditions in November this year voted in favour.

Regrettably, we did not reach the draconian anti-trade union threshold necessary for strike action, but we will be re-balloting our members working in the Welsh Ambulance Service for industrial action in January.

This comes as your government has announced £460m of business rate relief which is effectively a 75% tax cut for private businesses and an example of how there is money that could be reprioritised.

Business tax is a blunt tool increasing profits of those businesses doing well whilst keeping other businesses on life support at the same time as reducing through below inflation public sector pay awards, the amount of money people have to spend in them.

We are now calling on you and your government to follow your counterparts in Scotland and use devolved powers to provide a meaningful solution to the issue of low pay in the health service which is having devastating consequences for an already exhausted workforce.

Many of our members voted for a Labour Government in the Senedd in the belief that the Welsh NHS would be in better hands under Labour. But our NHS is only as good its staff.

For it to thrive, staff need to be fairly paid, treated well and given reasons to stay in this demanding work. The failure to offer better pay under devolution has left our members feeling let down.

UNISON has had formal and informal meetings with health minister Eluned Morgan with absolutely no movement on pay and this is what needs urgent action if we are to avoid an escalation of industrial action across the Welsh health service in the new year.

It is within your power to hold constructive talks with ourselves and our fellow health unions in Wales to reach an agreement which would reverse the awful situation many thousands of NHS workers, providing vital public services, are now facing.

Such an agreement would protect the Welsh NHS, help to minimise the potential of a deeper crisis this winter ensuring patients and communities are protected.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dominic MacAskill".

Dominic MacAskill
UNISON Wales Regional Secretary