

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACTStacy Kuwahara
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(661) 308-6805**SEIU Negotiations**

In May 2024, Kern County began negotiating with SEIU Local 521 for a successor Memorandum of Understanding. In November 2024, the County issued its Last, Best, and Final proposal to SEIU Local 521. The County's proposal included a salary package at a cost of over \$36 million annually, one-time payout options amounting to over \$2.8 million, and salary adjustments to specific job classifications costing over \$3 million. In December 2024, SEIU Local 521 submitted the County's proposal for a membership vote with the option to accept the proposal or authorize a strike. When it submitted the County's proposal to its membership, SEIU Local 521 recommended that the membership reject the proposal. Membership rejected the proposal and authorized a strike.

Kern County respects the rights of its employees to engage in protected activity, including the right to strike. However, Kern County also expects SEIU Local 521 and its members to comply with both federal and state laws, laws which require a person without security clearance to be escorted at all times when seeking access to restricted locations. Kern County also expects all employees, whether a union member or not, to comply with County policies and meet performance standards. Holding employees accountable is not an unfair labor practice nor is it retaliation.

The County presented its Last, Best and Final Offer to SEIU Local 521, but also invited SEIU Local 521 to return to the table to continue discussions. SEIU Local 521 refused unless the County modified its proposal. SEIU Local 521 also claims the County has millions and millions of dollars stashed away in "Restricted Funds." It claims that the County can use these "Restricted funds" however it wants. Unfortunately, that is not how County funding works. The County has explained its budget to SEIU Local 521 several times, but SEIU Local 521 remains adamant that the money is available. However, "Restricted" means "Restricted" and it is not available to fund the ongoing salary increases SEIU Local 521 demands.

A strike will certainly impact County services, with the impact ranging from the closure of some County offices to delays in some County services. For that reason, the County's priority during a strike will focus on the continued delivery of essential services, the absence of which would pose a significant threat to public health and safety. To avoid such a threat, both the County and SEIU Local 521 will be meeting to identify which essential employees will continue to work during a strike.

The County is committed to providing fair compensation and benefits to all County employees and doing so in a fiscally responsible manner. For those interested in hearing about the County's budget, the County will be presenting its mid-year budget recap at the Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday February 25th at 9am. The public and all associations are encouraged to attend.

For further inquiries, please contact Stacy Kuwahara at (661) 308-6805 or kuwaharas@kerncounty.com.

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