Battle over fair pay for nurses and midwives ramps up

Hundreds of nurses and midwives have angrily condemned the Berejiklian Government for ignoring their personal sacrifices, as lawyers representing public sector unions return to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission to fight a planned wage freeze.

Delegates of the NSW Nurses and Midwives’ Association (NSWNMA) tonight called for the public sector wage freeze to be scrapped, and demanded the government prioritise safe workplaces and proper financial recognition for all health workers.

Nurses and midwives expressed their frustration over a lack of support from the Berejiklian Government as they gathered online for the NSWNMA’s 75th Annual Conference.

NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said nurses and midwives had spent the past 10 weeks campaigning against the wage freeze and were committed to continue until they achieved fair pay.

“Nurses and midwives’ conversations with local businesses on how a wage freeze would hurt them have resonated, especially in rural and regional communities recovering from drought and the bushfires,” said Mr Holmes.

“Numerous economists have implored the government not to proceed with a public sector wage freeze. Even the Treasury conceded that reducing public sector wage growth would deepen the recession.

“It is morally disgraceful, callous, and it makes no economic sense.

“Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania have all committed to wage increases for their nurses and midwives this year and for the coming years, while Queensland has promised two increases next year.

“Yet despite being in the strongest fiscal position of all, the Berejiklian Government wants to punish nurses and midwives with a wage freeze that will impact the rest of their working lives.

“This year we’ve been trying to celebrate nurses and midwives who dedicate their lives to protecting the health of others.

“Every day of the COVID-19 pandemic nurses have fronted up, despite the risks and personal sacrifices, and their commitment deserves to be acknowledged. This is not an unreasonable request on the government to deliver.”

The NSWNMA will reappear in the NSW Industrial Relations Commission on Friday (24 July) alongside other public sector unions to oppose the wage freeze. Further hearings are scheduled for 30 and 31 July.

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NSWNMA delegates voted in favour of the following resolution during the 75th Annual Conference:

That this Annual Conference of the NSWNMA condemns the Berejiklian Government’s plan to freeze the wages of nurses and midwives, despite its own Treasury advice indicating this will worsen the recession. Public sector workers support local economies by spending our wages in local shops and businesses.

Nurses and midwives continue to put our lives on the line in order to protect the community through the pandemic and our commitment deserves to be acknowledged. We should not be punished with a wage freeze that will affect the rest of our working lives. This conference reaffirms our demand for safe workplaces and proper financial recognition and we call upon the Berejiklian Government to reverse its decision to impose a wage freeze. We will continue campaigning in our local electorates across New South Wales until we achieve safe workplaces and fair pay.