

P R E S S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chillicothe Veterans Affairs Union Members to Protest Sudden Closure of Inpatient Care Unit Which Led to the Displacement of Over 375 Veterans, Putting Them at Risk of Contracting COVID-19

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Protest Comes Amidst a Years-Long Fight for a Fair Union Contract, as Trump Administration has Repeatedly Undermined Federal Workers Union

Chillicothe, OH - Members of American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 1631 along with veterans groups and supporters will come together on Saturday, January 23rd, to protest the recent unexplained closure of the acute care facilities at the Chillicothe's Veteran Affairs (VA) Medical Center. Union members who work for the Chillicothe VA believe the impetus for closing these facilities is VA leadership's desire to privatize local veteran care, and that this decision has severely eroded employees' ability to care for Ohio's veterans.

Local VA management have significantly downsized the Chillicothe facility, removing 26 beds for COVID patients and 30 beds for acute care patients, which has caused over 375 veterans to be discharged, including at least 28 COVID-19 patients. Another 10 veterans seeking medical assistance were refused service.

Hundreds of impacted veterans have been rerouted to local private hospitals and community care facilities that are already overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients, putting them at risk of contracting the virus and paying higher medical fees. Moreover, due to the VA's decision to close the local COVID-19 patient unit last fall, dozens of staff and veterans have been impacted by a COVID-19 outbreak in the detox and psychiatric units at the local facility.

VA workers and the local groups in attendance are demanding the immediate reopening of the acute care facility to better serve local veterans. The protest will take place via car caravan to ensure social distancing is maintained, and participating local AFGE members will be available for media interviews.

WHEN: Saturday, January 23rd, 12pm ET

WHERE: Yoctangee Park, Chillicothe, OH 45601

WHO: AFGE Local 1631 members

Members of the local Ohio AFL-CIO

Members of the local American Legion

Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars

Members of the Mid-Ohio Jeepers Organization

Under Secretary Robert Wilkie's leadership, the VA has developed a [track record](#) of ignoring worker concerns and putting veterans' lives at risk. Members of AFGE NVAC have been fighting for a fair contract for years, demanding safe working conditions and adequate staffing levels, the space and equipment VA workers need to ensure veterans receive the best care possible, and mechanisms to protect workers from the whims of management.

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The importance of a fair contract is a matter of life and death during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of [114 VA employees](#) and over [8,200 veterans](#). Currently, more than [16,000 VA employees](#) and [151,000 veterans](#) have tested positive.

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Clips:

<https://www.chillicothe Gazette.com/story/news/2021/01/08/chillicothe-va-union-protests-closures-acute-care-facilities/6585545002/>

<https://www.chillicothe Gazette.com/story/news/2021/01/09/chillicothe-va-union-postpones-protest/6608237002/>

<https://wbex.iheart.com/content/2021-01-10-concerns-aired-about-decisions-in-chillicothe-va-medical-center/>