

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 27, 2021

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Town Hall

Minneapolis VA Union Members Join Congresswoman Ilhan Omar to Discuss Their COVID-19 Experience, Demand Protections for Frontline Workers

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VA and Nurses Unions Come Together for Nationwide Day of Action Demanding COVID-19 Protections for Frontline Workers

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Survey: 60% of Veterans Affairs Union Members Polled Say They Weren't Notified When Fellow Staff Members Contracted COVID-19, 40 % reported not receiving adequate PPE

Minneapolis, MN - Nearly a year into the pandemic, essential workers at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) still lack the vital protections they need to keep themselves, their families, and our nation's veterans safe from exposure to the virus. In a recent survey conducted by American Federation of Government Employees' National VA Council (AFGE NVAC), the union representing over 265,000 VA workers, **60 percent of respondents reported that their facility did not alert them when fellow staff members contracted COVID-19 and nearly 50 percent of respondents stated that they were not notified prior to working with COVID-19 positive patients.**

On January 27th, AFGE Locals 1969 and 3669 are hosting a town hall with Congresswoman Ilhan Omar to discuss their front-line experience and why their union needs a seat at the table so that all employee voices can be heard when it comes to making decisions about safety protocols and procedures. **Nearly 40 percent of survey respondents reported not receiving adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) at their VA facility.** Local workers are also demanding an end to [systemic racism](#) and union busting at VA facilities across the country. Details below:

WHEN: Wednesday, January 27th from 7:00pm-8:00pm CT

WHERE: **RSVP required**

Please email Ash Hagerty at ashenhagerty@gmail.com prior to joining Zoom call <https://zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tJcldemoqTkoHNJGBJBz44WluCJzs-fW-ZRx>

WHO: Congresswoman Ilhan Omar

AFGE Local 1969 members

AFGE Local 3669 members

"When it came to making decisions about COVID-19 safety procedures, employees were shut out of the decision making process entirely," says AFGE Local 1969 Chief Steward Tom Garvey. "Management should have collaborated with worker representatives - those who do the work and are familiar with our facilities and patients could have made far better decisions. Instead, we were silenced."

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AFGE National VA Council



Additionally, AFGE Locals 1969 and 3669 will join hundreds of AFGE NVAC and National Nurses United (NNU) members in holding actions in over a dozen states earlier in the day on January 27th, to demand better workplace protections and a voice on the job. These actions will include protests, button up actions, and town hall meetings here in Minneapolis as well as Manhattan, Washington D.C., Durham, Atlanta, Chicago, Albany, Des Moines, Denver and Chillicothe - among others.

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.

Union members have been taking to the streets for months, protesting the VA's refusal to provide hazardous duty pay for VA staff and continuing shortages of PPE. They have also been calling for an end to [systemic racism](#) and union busting at VA facilities across the country. The survey results come after a years-long assault by the Trump administration on the collective bargaining rights of VA workers and a broader push to privatize the VA. **In fact, 20 percent of survey respondents say their facility has cut the number of beds available for veterans and have intentionally left vacant positions unfilled to make their case for expanding the privatization veteran care.**

The importance of a fair contract can be a matter of life and death during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of [114 VA employees](#) and over [8,300 veterans](#). Currently, more than [16,100 VA employees](#) and [153,000 veterans](#) have tested positive. **Over 88 percent of survey respondents said they knew of an employee at their facility that has contracted COVID-19.**

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