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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Nurses at St. Joseph's Medical Center File Class Action Lawsuit Against Prime Healthcare and Ascension for Distress Caused by Unsafe Staffing

Joliet, IL— Nurses at St. Joseph's Medical Center, represented by the Illinois Nurses Association, have filed a class action lawsuit against Ascension Healthcare and Prime Healthcare for inflicting severe emotional distress by chronically understaffing the hospital. Due to the hospital's ongoing refusal to meet safe nurse-to-patient ratios, nurses have suffered significant burnout, fatigue, and damage to their mental and physical health.

"Every nurse at St. Joseph's has seen a patient suffer because the floor wasn't staffed properly—whether that's a patient falling, experiencing bed sores because they weren't turned over in time, or missing a medication dose. It's traumatizing to watch and know you couldn't help," said Mary Sue Bulger, an RN at St. Joseph's. "Nurses give our all for our patients, but it will never be enough if management refuses to properly staff the hospital."

According to the complaint, **Ascension and Prime repeatedly breached St. Joseph's legally-mandated nurse staffing plan, forcing nurses to work shifts that put themselves and their patients in danger**. Nurses have filed hundreds of "Assignment Despite Objection" forms against the hospital to document the times they were asked to work in a shift that compromised patient safety. These complaints were routinely ignored by St. Joseph's for-profit owners (Ascension Healthcare from 2018 to 2025 and Prime Healthcare from March 2025 to present), leading nurses to feel demoralized, humiliated, and hopeless as they worked themselves to the brink of exhaustion.

Under the Illinois Hospital Licensing Act, each Illinois hospital must implement and follow a nurse staffing plan prepared in consultation with a nursing care committee. While there are no legally-mandated nurse-to-patient ratios in Illinois, this plan ensures nurses at each facility have input into their hospital's minimum safe nurse-to-patient ratios and staffing standards. By chronically understaffing shifts, Ascension and Prime repeatedly violated their own staffing plan, which already had lower nurse-to-patient ratios than recommended by the nursing care committee and other industry standards.

"By endangering the lives of patients through severe understaffing and forcing [nurses] to watch helplessly as the needs of their patients are ignored [Ascension Healthcare and Prime Healthcare] have engaged in conduct that is unethical, immoral and indifferent to the conduct expected of a hospital, to provide safe and adequate patient care," the complaint reads.

Plaintiff nurses in the case include Cathie Wolff, Mary Sue Bulger, Paula Koranda, and Cindy Poe. Only Wolff and Bulger still work at the hospital, as the burnout conditions forced the other two plaintiffs to find employment elsewhere – adding to the exodus of hundreds of nurses who have left St. Joseph's in recent years.

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The complaint filed by the INA on June 2 represents an innovative strategy that could ultimately provide a legal avenue to force hospitals to staff their facilities properly.

The 584 nurses at St. Joseph's are represented by the St. Joseph's Nurses Association, a local bargaining unit of the Illinois Nurses Association.

Community members and advocates can send a letter to Prime CEO Prem Reddy demanding the company invest in the hospital and its workers at bit.ly/HoldPrimeAccountable.

The Illinois Nurses Association is an independent union fighting for healthcare workers and patients across the public and private sector. The union provides professional representation and helps improve working conditions for nurses and healthcare workers in its local bargaining units. For more information about the INA, visit <http://www.illinoisnurses.com>.