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Up to 8,500 UC employees may go on strike over wages today

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As many as 8,500 University of California employees – including UC Davis workers – are expected to hit the picket lines today to protest a deadlock over wage hikes.

The strike involves workers represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 3299, who perform housekeeping, cafeteria and security services on UC campuses.

The strike is planned to run through Friday at UC's 10 campuses and five medical centers, including UC Davis facilities in Sacramento and Davis.

The union gave UC officials two weeks' notice of a strike because an additional 11,500 health care workers may opt not to cross picket lines, which could affect patient care.

Union officials claim their wages have fallen behind those at other colleges, including California's community college system. Many employees earn \$10 an hour, which is as much as 25 percent less than comparable workers at other institutions are paid, the union said.

Negotiations have been under way for nearly a year to resolve the wage dispute. The union is seeking a pay increase to \$15 an hour, claiming low wages make 96 percent of its members eligible for government welfare programs.

"The workers at the University of California are living in poverty," said Lakesha Harrison, a UC vocational nurse and president of the union local. "UC is just forgetting this work force and it's my hope that we are all out there picketing."

University officials offered to increase wages to between \$11.50 and \$12 an hour. But the union rejected the offer, and 97 percent of its members voted to strike.

A San Francisco Superior Court judge Friday issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting the strike. But Harrison said the order directed the union to specifically notify university officials about strike times, which it did, and that the strike would start as planned today.

In a statement issued Friday, university officials said they expect union members to obey the court order and report to work.

"Our proposals are fair and responsive to many of the union's expressed concerns," said Howard Pripas, director of UC labor relations, "and our employees deserve to have these

negotiations resolved."

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