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To: National Labor Relations Board

1/12/25

Family Farm Defenders Strongly Supports SEIU Union at Group Health Cooperative (GHC)

- Calls Upon National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and Group Health Cooperative (GHC) Management to Fully Respect the Collective Bargaining Rights for Essential Healthcare Workers

It has come to our attention that efforts by healthcare workers at Group Health Cooperative (GHC) to form a SEIU union under NLRB rules is now being hindered by GHC management. This is completely unacceptable, and we wish to speak out in support of the right of healthcare workers to form a union.

Family Farm Defenders is a national grassroots organization with over 3000 members, including 500+ members in Wisconsin. We were originally formed by WI dairy farmers back in 1996 who were struggling to get a fair price for their milk. Another aspect of their struggle back then (and today) was getting decent quality healthcare as essential workers in our nation's economy.

Family farmers do not have many choices when it comes to healthcare in the U.S. Some family farmers have a spouse who works off-farm and thus have access to more healthcare options. But for those family farmers who do not (like myself), their only option is to enter the marketplace offered under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that was passed under the Obama Administration.

Thankfully, one of the options offered in WI under ACA is to select healthcare coverage from a cooperative such as GHC. Many family farmers (such as myself) would naturally do that. Why is that such an obvious choice? Because, cooperates have principles!

Cooperatives legally exist as not-for-profit entities to serve their owner members. They do NOT exist to maximize profits for share holders. Instead their goal is to provide quality goods/services to their members at fair cost. Given that cooperatives like GHC are also community-based, they will not "cut and run" like many other footloose corporations – another reason for family farmers to place their trust in a healthcare cooperative that will not (presumably) abandon their community at the drop of a hat.

As a healthcare cooperative, GHC was created and continues to exist thanks to its WI members (myself included) to serve this critical community need. A fair operating expense for any cooperative includes paying its workers a living wage with decent benefits. The way this is achieved and guaranteed is by allowing workers to form a union. No cooperative in good faith should deny its own workers a union.

Family farmers are not unfamiliar or ignorant of this process. In fact, family farmers routinely organize their own producer cooperatives to guarantee that they have the ability to negotiate and guarantee their own members a fair (parity) price and other bargaining rights in the corporate dominated marketplace.

In our opinion, it is antithetical and hypocritical for ANY cooperative to deny its own workers the right to collectively organize and form a union – this includes GHC. Their apparent effort to undermine their own workers' efforts to form a union with SEIU is a horrible violation of cooperative principles.

This is why farmers and workers have intrinsic solidarity when it comes to collective bargaining rights. We urge GHC to respect their own healthcare workers' rights to form a labor union, and urge the NLRB to respect and defend that right as stipulated under federal legislation.

Sincerely,

John E. Peck

John E. Peck, executive director, Family Farm Defenders (and GHC member)