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150 healthcare laundry workers facing layoff allege anti-union discrimination at Kaiser contractor Emerald Textiles

This week, 150 low-wage essential healthcare workers who are mostly women and immigrants received WARN Act layoff notices after their employer, private equity-backed laundry company Emerald Textiles, announced the permanent closure of their Pittsburg, CA, facility. The workers launder bed sheets, gowns, and other linens for Kaiser Permanente and other major hospitals. Emerald operates 15 healthcare laundry facilities in California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah.

The workers allege that Emerald's decision to close the facility is anti-union discrimination, as the company plans to move the hospitals' work to one of their non-union facilities. The closure announcement came amidst contract negotiations between Emerald and the workers' union, SEIU Workers United Western Region. The closure was a shock to workers who have toiled through the pandemic to keep hospitals' linens clean and safe.

"After 20 years at this job, I'm devastated that Emerald will take away everything that me and my co-workers have fought for, just to get rid of our union," said Maria Vasquez, who works at the Pittsburg laundry. "Why would they kick us to the curb when we have so much experience, and haven't stopped working during this pandemic?"

Amid the pandemic and labor shortages, experienced healthcare laundry workers, especially those who enjoy the protections & stability of a union contract, are essential to keeping hospital patients and staff safe. Emerald purchased eight unionized laundry facilities, including the Pittsburg, CA facility, following [an infusion of \\$200 million of private equity funds](#).

"For a company with the resources of Emerald Textiles to destroy the lives of 150 families is wrong, but doing it just before the holidays is particularly unnecessary and cruel," said Maria Rivera, Regional Manager of the employees' union. "We hope that Emerald's customers and investors understand the damage that these plans will provoke and redirect the company toward a more responsible behavior in the immediate future. The health and safety of everyone in the East Bay is at stake."

**** BACKGROUND ****

For years, California's healthcare laundry workers had won union contracts at most of the industry's major employers. Since Emerald entered the industry, they have undercut their competition by not providing the wages, benefits and protections that keep union laundry jobs safe and secure, lowering overall labor standards for the industry. In June 2021, a [National Labor Relations Board judge ruled](#) that Emerald unlawfully fired dozens of laundry workers because of their union affiliation after purchasing a laundry in Commerce, CA. Emerald purchased eight unionized laundry facilities owned by Angelica Corporation, including the

Pittsburg, CA facility, following [an infusion of \\$200 million of private equity funds from BlackRock Private Equity Partners, DWS Private Equity, Allstate Investments, CH Investment Partners.](#)