

What is an economic reopener?

What does a wage or economic “reopener” mean?

It’s an opportunity to bargain economic increases in our contract, such as wages, premiums, differentials, and incentive pay to meet our needs now and to bring our wages up to competitive market rates. It’s not just a bonus; any contract provision attached to dollars is up for negotiation.

How is an economic reopener different from regular contract negotiations?

Under a reopener, we would not be negotiating elements of our contract that are not attached to economics. That means we will not be negotiating provisions such as New Employee Orientation language, holidays, discipline and grievance procedures, and others.

Why would we bargain only our wages? Is it going to be worth an extension?

We are massively behind market rates when it comes to wages, and that is a fact. The question of whether this process is worth it is the guiding principle for our bargaining team. We will constantly ask ourselves when looking at Providence’s proposals — is this proposal worth bringing back to our co-workers for a vote? Is this proposal worth extending our contract for two more years? Is this proposal enough to be competitive and help us recruit and retain now?

If we reach an agreement through the economic reopener, will we still bargain a new contract next year when our current one expires?

No. If we reach an agreement, the agreement would have a built-in contract extension and we would not be going back to the table in 2023.

What opportunities are we giving up by negotiating an early economic reopener?

It means that all non-economic provisions will remain in place as written under our current contract. With a reopener, we are forgoing the chance to bargain them next year when our current contract is set to expire.

What about MOUs and letters of understanding that were set to expire under the current contract?

Our bargaining team will work closely with our legal team to ensure that all provisions with deadlines under the previous contract will continue under an extension.

Whose idea was it to bargain wages earlier than anticipated?

Providence Swedish reached out to our union team and proposed a return to the bargaining table to negotiate wages one year ahead of schedule. They communicated to us that they understand the urgency around our recruitment and retention issues and have shown a desire to act now. This process is entirely voluntary for both us and Providence Swedish. Providence Swedish is very aware of the strength of our unity and of our power; they’ve seen what happens when we wield it.

Is this a ploy from Providence Swedish to attempt to divide us? How can we be certain that Providence Swedish will negotiate in good faith? Is this going to be a waste of time?

There is no way to know with 100% certainty that Providence Swedish will negotiate in good faith, but we are encouraged by the fact that they approached our union team first with the idea of an economic reopener. However, we are prepared to walk away from the table if we sense that Providence Swedish is not taking the process seriously and their proposals are too far from our values and the standards we’ve set for ourselves.

When will bargaining take place? How long will it last? What is the expected timeline?

We've made it very clear to Providence Swedish that we do not intend to drag this out. We have proposed a compressed bargaining timeline with two bargaining sessions per week, starting in August. But before we begin bargaining, all union members will have the opportunity to vote to approve our bargaining priorities — this is what we call proposal votes.

What job classes and campuses are covered under this negotiation? Is it nurses only?

When we bargain, we bargain together. That means we are going into this economic reopener with a bargaining team that represents all locations, departments, and job classes across Providence Swedish. We will be working toward an agreement that provides the economic increases that meet the needs of all our coworkers.

How will an economic reopener help with our ongoing staffing crisis?

We know our coworkers have left for higher-paying jobs in other healthcare systems. In order to have consistent staffing in our departments, Swedish needs to be a leader in wages and provide an economic package that will recruit and retain.

What happens next if an agreement is reached between Providence Swedish and our union bargaining team?

If we reach an agreement during this economic reopener, we can count on important economic improvements taking effect soon thereafter. That will be really good news, and we will vote as a membership to ratify the agreement if our bargaining team recommends so. After ratification, our next steps will be to build on those improvements in our departments and workplaces. We have many labor-management committees, and our coworkers who serve on those committees will continue their ongoing work to ensure management is following our contract.

What happens if an agreement is not reached or if we vote to reject the agreement? Can we go on strike immediately?

If we don't reach an agreement or if we vote as a membership to reject a contract extension, we will go back to the bargaining table in 2023 and we will immediately prepare to harness the full power of our unity — standing with our bargaining team, taking public actions, leveraging our community's solidarity, activating the support of our 34,000+ fellow union members, and the backing of the +2 million members in our international union, SEIU. All provisions of our current contract are in place until the contract expires on June 30, 2023, at which point we can hold informational pickets and other actions, up to withholding our labor if we have to.

Who sits on our union bargaining team? What is the role of the bargaining team?

We have a bargaining team made up of our coworkers from a diverse range of departments, job classes, and racial and other identities. We nominated them to make decisions about our proposals and determine what action steps we need to take to win a great economic agreement for our contract.

How can I get involved in bargaining?

There is a role for everyone to play, and we need strong teams in every department. Talk to a delegate or your organizer to share your ideas and learn more about how you and your coworkers can contribute to winning the best agreement possible.

How do I stay in the loop with bargaining updates? Will there be unity actions I can participate in?

Yes! We will be holding weekly unity breaks starting the first week of bargaining at a central location on each campus. Unity breaks will be our opportunity to hear directly from the bargaining team. In addition, we'll distribute weekly bulletins with the most current information, and those bulletins will contain QR codes to access bargaining updates online. Visit swedishunited.org to find the latest information.