



McLean used to be an even tougher place to hold a job. In 2021, us Research Assistants earned starting wages of \$15.10/hour and Lab Assistants made even less. Living in the Boston area, with ever-increasing rents and skyrocketed inflation, was simply untenable when our weekly paychecks averaged around \$475. We suffered abuses of power, as PIs took advantage of our loose job descriptions and graduate school ambitions. In an already hard working environment, during a pandemic, McLean changed their time off policy, reducing our total sick days per year from 8 days to 5. It became painfully clear to us that the hospital could do anything they wanted without consulting their employees, because we had no voice in our working conditions.

To rebalance this power, in January 2021, some RAs started talking about unionizing and contacted AFSCME, who agreed to support our campaign. After months of union-busting tactics from McLean, we won our union election in June 2021.

McLean argues that the massive raises given to clinical staff—and other RAs across the MGB system—in the wake of our unionization effort were not retaliatory. You can decide that for yourself. All we know is that such large raises had never been given in such a manner before, and since we had just unionized, they didn't apply to us. The raises attempted to dismantle our own union support, because RAs were already frustrated with low wages, and it seemed that the union was to blame for our lack of a raise. Yet these raises never would have occurred if we hadn't rocked the boat and scared the MGB system into providing better working conditions for all.

A union is nothing without a contract, and in September 2021, we started negotiating with McLean Hospital management. We bargained for 12 months, and in that time made many concessions, but also gained more than the hospital ever thought they'd give us. Again, this 12 month timeline was carefully calculated by the hospital in an attempt to erode union support, but we stayed strong, campaigning for our contract across campus, holding open bargaining sessions, and showing the hospital we wouldn't back down. In September 2022, the bargaining committee reached an agreement on a contract with Mclean, which included many provisions and rights that McLean had previously shown harsh resistance to. Days later, we put the contract to a vote and it passed unanimously with a vote of 123-0. It was a massive victory to win the first ever union contract at McLean Hospital, one that RAs unanimously supported, and one that guaranteed to 40% wage increases, 2.5% annual salary increases, 14 weeks of retroactive pay, just cause and a grievance procedure, codified job descriptions and safety language, and a discounted MBTA pass!

Some of our hard-fought gains have been *mysteriously* granted to the rest of the employees at the Hospital, another classic union-busting technique to show other employees that a union isn't necessary. But when your coworkers talk about their own 2.5% merit increase, or their MBTA

pass, you can smile proudly and know that it was RAs just like you that won these policies for all workers at McLean.

Since our contract was ratified, we've become a fully-fledged union, elected E-board members, attended AFSCME conventions, made headway with working conditions at McLean, and celebrated the first anniversary of our contract. We're in awe of all the progress we've made, and excited for all the work yet to come!