Greetings Conference Participants,

On Friday April 5, 2013, twelve days before our annual conference, Unite Here, a national labor organizing group, informed the NMPHA Board of a national boycott against Hyatt hotels and has recommended that we move our conference. We recognize and support the cause for better treatment of hotel workers, so learning of this boycott led to intensive decisions and deliberations about responses to the request.

After extensive deliberation by all parties involved, obtaining expert advice from our keynote speaker, Linda Rae Murray, MD, MPH (Past President of APHA, Occupational Internist, and long-time public health advocate), learning from local labor leaders that there is no strike, and because of a binding contract that would leave NMPHA responsible for the bulk of the cost of the conference and be financially devastating to NMPHA, we have decided to go forward with our conference. Moreover, we believe there is a substantial non-monetary cost to the public health community and New Mexico by not having the conference, which would be the likely result of canceling at the Hyatt.

There are many other social injustices and public health crisis that are occurring throughout New Mexico. Our front-line public health workers and advocates who will be presenting at next week’s conference also deserve to be heard and should be given the opportunity to create momentum for the public health causes and health disparities they passionately work to address. We need this conference in order to band together to discuss strategies and solutions that will bring positive changes to our state and improve the health of New Mexico families and children.

We have learned of several other organizations that have had the same experience being asked to move to another venue just days before their conference. First, the Service Employees International Union at their annual conference did not change venues, but chose to show solidarity by wearing buttons in support of the labor movement. The American Public Health Association (APHA) had a similar occurrence before an annual conference and also chose to not change venues. Most recently, last month when the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. was asked to move from the Albuquerque Hyatt, they did not due to the financial consequences of breaking their contract. Notably, at the conference, there was no protest or evidence of dissent.

We stand behind social and economic justice, health equity, and advocacy efforts that empower marginalized communities. We believe the conference can serve as a platform to advance the goals of the boycott, and we have planned a number of action steps to do so during the conference. We have the opportunity to bring labor rights issues to light when hundreds of public health professionals and advocates will already be together under one roof. We have been in contact with Dr. Murray, who supports our decision. She will address the health impacts of social and economic injustices during her keynote address, and will also provide her expert advice on how New Mexico can better engage in labor rights issues.

The Hyatt informed us that they are unaware of any demonstrations or protests scheduled at this site. We look forward to having great discussions at the conference next week. We also understand and respect the choices of some individuals and/or organizations to withdraw their attendance. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at: nmphasubmissions@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

New Mexico Public Health Association (NMPHA) and the NM CARES Health Disparities Center