



December 13, 2024

The Honorable Bill Lee, Governor of the State of Tennessee  
The Honorable Sheila Butt, Mayor of Maury County, TN  
The Honorable Chaz Molder, Mayor of Columbia, TN  
The Honorable Sen. Joey Hensley, Hohenwald, TN  
The Honorable U.S. Rep. Andy Ogles, Tennessee, 5th Congressional District

CC: Columbia City and Maury County Councils; TN Economic Development Department; Heads of Development Corporations at the City & County Level; and State & Federal Legislative Representatives for Maury County.

**Subject: Call for Action to Protect Tennessee Jobs & Hold Mersen Accountable**

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Dear Governor Lee, Mayor Butt, Mayor Molder, Sen. Hensley, and Rep. Ogles:

With the holiday season upon us, Tennessean families should be focused on celebration — not survival. Yet at Mersen's Columbia plant, workers face a devastating reality: 80% of the workforce has been furloughed, and 25% will be permanently laid off, with terminations effective December 15th. On that date, workers will lose not only their paychecks but also their healthcare. These cuts come despite Mersen's record-setting financial performance, shameless collection of public subsidies, and public commitments made to this community. To add insult to injury, Mersen is ramping up its hiring of temporary workers — a move that only deepens the betrayal felt by longtime employees. For these workers and their families, the holiday season has been transformed into a time of uncertainty and hardship.

Just last year, many of you stood beside Mersen executives at a ribbon-cutting ceremony, celebrating the \$70 million expansion of its Columbia facility. It was a moment of shared optimism, with promises of steady, well-paying jobs for the community. Governor Lee heralded it as a win for Tennessee workers, and city and county officials echoed those sentiments. But now, Mersen has broken its promises. Instead of creating jobs, they are slashing them — sending families into financial distress right before the holidays.

This betrayal is not just a blow to the workers and their families. It is a betrayal of every taxpayer in Tennessee whose dollars helped fund Mersen's expansion. The public supported this company, offering tax breaks, development incentives, and community goodwill. In return, Mersen vowed to create quality jobs. Instead, it is gutting its workforce while continuing to expand operations elsewhere.



Mersen is no struggling company. It is thriving. The multinational corporation operates 35 plants worldwide, including 10 in the United States. In 2023 alone, Mersen recorded \$1.27 billion in global sales, with North America contributing \$486 million — its highest revenue in years. U.S. government programs like the CHIPS Act and Inflation Reduction Act have further fueled this growth, yet Tennessee workers have seen none of the benefits. On the contrary, they are being discarded as Mersen moves work to other locations, prioritizing profit over people.

Adding insult to injury, Mersen’s actions follow a historic vote by workers at the Columbia facility to unionize and join IUE-CWA. These workers sought fairness: clear pay structures, safer working conditions, and pathways to permanent employment for temporary workers. Rather than bargain with them in good faith, Mersen hired the notorious anti-union law firm Jackson Lewis. Within weeks following this historic vote and formal recognition of IUE-CWA as the collective bargaining representative by the National Labor Relations Board, the company announced sweeping furloughs and layoffs. This type of retaliation is illegal under federal labor law. IUE-CWA has since filed an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge against Mersen for its failure to bargain over the decisions and effects of the furloughs and layoffs required by federal law.

The timing of these layoffs is no accident. Companies know that layoffs right before the holidays hit families the hardest. Parents are forced to make painful choices about gifts, meals, and even basic bills. The emotional toll of job loss is compounded by the expectations of the season — a time when family, hope, and stability should be at their strongest. Mersen has taken that away from its workers and, in doing so, has broken its promise to this community.

This is why we are turning to you. Tennessee’s elected officials played a key role in bringing Mersen to Columbia. It is only right that you now stand with the workers you promised to protect. The workers and families of this community are watching. We respectfully call on you to take action.

## **Our Requests to You**

1. **Cease and Desist the Layoffs & Furloughs:** Call on Mersen CEO Luc Themelin to cease and desist its illegal actions and immediately bargain with the union as required by federal labor law, including establishing recall rights for laid-off workers, respecting seniority, and preventing unilateral transfer of work to other locations.
2. **Worker Healthcare:** Demand that Mersen maintain worker health insurance to preserve worker dignity and well-being through the holidays.
3. **Hold Mersen Accountable:** Take steps to claw back the more than \$500,000 in public subsidies and tax abatements if Mersen refuses to negotiate in good faith, and make clear that no future incentives will be granted to companies that betray Tennessee workers and taxpayers.

The stakes could not be higher. This is about more than just the impacted Mersen workers— it’s about the dignity of working people, the integrity of public commitments, and the role of elected officials in



protecting their communities. Your intervention can make a difference. There is still time to reverse these layoffs and restore hope to Tennessee families.

Tennessee workers and their families deserve better. The community deserves better than to see its public dollars squandered on a company that prioritizes profit over people. We ask you to act. We ask you to stand with Tennessee workers as you did at that ribbon-cutting and send a clear message to Mersen: **You cannot exploit Tennessee workers, and you cannot break promises to our communities.**

The workers and voters of this community will remember who stood with them in this moment of crisis.

Sincerely,

**Carl Kennebrew**

President, IUE-CWA

**Richard Honeycutt**

Vice President, CWA District 3

**Kelvin Torres**

President, IUE-CWA Local 502 (and former Mersen Worker in St. Marys, PA)

**Robert Fox**

Bargaining Committee, Mersen Columbia Worker

**Tracy Jones**

Bargaining Committee, Mersen Columbia Worker

**Larry Baker**

Bargaining Committee, Mersen Columbia Worker