

rebuilding the
American Dream

September 5, 2007

Updates for business leaders on service workers' campaign to raise standards in Columbus, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati

Columbus Janitors Begin Bargaining

On the heels of successful negotiations in Cincinnati, Columbus janitors are next in the struggle for livable wages and health care in the Midwest

Just weeks after Cincinnati janitors drove home the first in a series of citywide contracts designed to reverse the region's erosion of quality jobs, Columbus janitors have stepped up to the plate. Workers and representatives from nine of Central Ohio's largest cleaning contractors began negotiations today for a first contract that will affect over 1,200 area janitors and set the standard for hundreds more.

"Today is a big day," said Columbus janitor and bargaining committee member Sonia Rodríguez. "After seeing our hard work pay off in Cincinnati contract talks, I am thrilled to be sitting down with our employers right here in Columbus."

As the Columbus janitors entered their first day of negotiations at the Renaissance Hotel, over a dozen religious leaders met them at the hotel entrance for a prayer service. The clergy, many of whom have been supporting the janitors during their two-year union organizing campaign, prayed for a just and peaceful outcome to the negotiations.

"Some of the finest people that I have ever known were the people with whom I worked side by side, folks from very diverse backgrounds," said Cantor Jack Chomsky of the summers he worked as a janitor while in high school. "It is hard but very honorable work that is crucial for our city. Janitors deserve our gratitude, along with a strong contract to ensure living wage salaries, affordable health care, and respect on the job."

The Cincinnati agreement was reached after representatives for 1,200 Cincinnati janitors and eight of the city's largest cleaning companies returned to the bargaining table to avert a citywide strike. Participants on both sides of the table engaged in constructive, cordial talks which took into account the challenges low-wage janitors face and the impact of a contract on the city's most impoverished neighborhoods.

The agreement has been hailed as a model for raising job and health care standards for low-wage workers throughout the region—including in Columbus and Indianapolis where janitors are currently fighting for improvements.

What's at Stake

Poverty wages

The majority of Columbus janitors earn between \$6.85 and \$8.00 an hour.

Part-time work

The majority of Columbus janitors do not have access to full-time janitorial positions, leaving them with the difficult choice between dire poverty and stringing together multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Lack of health insurance

Most Columbus janitors do not have access to affordable health insurance through their employer.

About SEIU

SEIU is the nation's largest union of property services workers, representing more than 225,000 janitors in 30 cities from coast to coast. SEIU janitors clean properties owned and managed by all the leading national commercial real estate companies. With more than 1.9 million members overall, SEIU is the nation's largest union.

About This Newsletter

Rebuilding the American Dream is a newsletter published by SEIU for building owners, property managers, and business leaders. Future issues will keep you informed about the progress of contract talks and the issues facing service workers in our cities.