BREAKING:

OVER 94% OF CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT WORKERS AUTHORIZE HISTORIC STRIKE

This is the first-time in the park’s 85-year history that workers vote to go on strike.

CHICAGO—Over 94% of landscape laborers, attendants, instructors, recreational leaders, supervisors and other workers in the Chicago Park District represented by SEIU Local 73 have voted to authorize a strike. The vote sets a path for a strike as early as mid-October by over 2,000 workers from over 250 Chicago parks if an agreement with the Chicago Park District cannot be reached. This would be the first time in the park’s 85-year history that workers strike.

After eight months of negotiations, the Chicago Park District has not presented a proposal that fully addresses the economic concerns and working conditions of park workers. The Chicago Park District has proposed a two percent raise after giving senior management up to a 20% raise this year. They’ve also proposed to double health care costs for workers.

“Chicago’s park workers work very hard every day to make sure the city has world class parks. They maintain all 250 plus parks, clean, safe, and welcoming for our kids and families. They make sure that huge international events like the Marathon and the Triathlon run smoothly. However, park management has refused to offer a proposal that reflects this. Park workers all across the city are struggling to make ends meet and can’t even enjoy the parks they work at when they’re forced to live in poverty. We expect the Chicago Park District and Mayor Lori Lightfoot to return to the negotiating table with the serious intent of offering park workers the world class contract they deserve,” said Dian Palmer, President of SEIU Local 73.

About two-thirds of the Chicago Park District workers are part-time. They work four or five days for 52 weeks each year. They receive no paid vacation, no holiday pay when they work holidays, and are not eligible for any health insurance. Part-time workers are paid 60 cents on the dollar of what full-time workers are paid in the same jobs for every hour worked. Most of them are forced to work another job to make ends meet. Workers want equal pay and benefits for the work that they do.

“I voted to go on strike because while we are committed to making sure Chicago’s kids and families have world class parks, I’m tired of living paycheck to paycheck and not being able to provide for my two kids the way I want to. It’s not right that park CEOs want to keep paying us poverty wages and denying us basic benefits while they’re giving themselves extravagant raises. It’s not right that I had to sell my car because I couldn’t afford it anymore. Chicago’s park workers deserve fair pay and dignity,” said Madeline Kummer, an hourly attendant at Chase Park.

The workers strike announcement dovetails the annual National Recreation and Park Association conference where the Chicago Park District is a finalist for the National Gold Medal Award. The award “honors communities throughout the United States that demonstrate excellence in long-range planning, resource management and innovative approaches to delivering superb park and recreation services…”. The announcement also coincides with the park district’s celebration of “85-years of Service.” Workers and allies will be at the Baltimore conference flyering and speaking out to let the NRPA that ‘Chicago Parks and Workers Deserve a Golden Medal, Not Management’.
“Because of our hard work, Chicago’s Parks are nominated this year for the National Gold Medal Award,” said Sean Ortiz, Park Supervisor at Blackhawks park, who is traveling all the way to Baltimore to get his voice heard. “Chicago deserved to be a gold medal finalist because we put in a lot of work to make sure Chicago’s parks are clean, safe, beautiful, and fun and offer the kind of programs for children and families that we all want to be a part of. But we also deserve a gold contract, not the measly proposals park CEOs are offering. There’s no excuse for having park workers that have put years into the parks and are still getting part-time pay with no benefits.”

The workers hope that Mayor Lightfoot and the Park District come back to the negotiating table and offer a fair contract that mirrors their hard-work in delivering world class parks for kids and families all across that city and for earning national recognition for Chicago’s parks.

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SEIU Local 73 represents more than 29,000 workers, primarily in public service and publicly funded positions in school districts, municipalities, social service agencies, and many other job classifications in Illinois and Indiana. We are dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families.