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**OVER 2,500 PARK DISTRICT WORKERS TO STRIKE OCTOBER 17*****First strike in the park's 85-year history as Park District continues to propose to double healthcare costs for workers***

**CHICAGO**—Landscape laborers, special recreation workers, attendants, instructors, recreational leaders, supervisors and other workers from over 250 parks in the Chicago Park District represented by SEIU Local 73 will strike on October 17. The workers will be joined by Chicago Public School staff represented by SEIU Local 73 and teachers represented by the Chicago Teachers Union, who also announced Wednesday their intention to strike on October 17. This would be the first strike in the park's 85-year history.

SEIU Local 73 represents 80% of Park District workers and are the lowest-paid in the parks and in the whole city. 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. During the last round of negotiations on Monday September 30, the park district made no new proposals or changes to their proposals. The Chicago Park District has continued to propose to double health care costs for workers.

"While other unions have settled, we represent 80% of the workers at the parks. 60% of park workers are part-time, even though they work at 52 weeks a year. So we have a lot of issues that we need to settle," said Jeff Howard, executive vice president of SEIU Local 73. "We need to change the dynamic between the park district and its workers. Because what the park district wants is to continue to take advantage of workers that are part time. If you've been working 20-years you can't get any benefits, you can't get any vacation days, and there are very few opportunities for promotion. This is why our contract hasn't been settled. We don't have any unreasonable requests of the city of Chicago and the Chicago Park District. Our workers want to make sure the parks are taken care of and that they're taken care of. These are award-winning, gold medal parks and that's because of the workers. We want a contract that reflects this, not that has workers continuing to struggle to make ends meet."

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.

The park district has continued to use the pension crisis as smokescreen and as a scare tactic in negotiations. Park management have mismanaged the fund and have allowed the pension to become underfunded for the past 20 years. "The Park District should be ashamed for using the pension crisis as leverage for negotiations. If they were really concerned about the crisis, they wouldn't have approved up to 20% raises for their senior management earlier this year," said Larry Alcott, SEIU's lead negotiator. "Workers pay 9% of their pay into the pension and are not eligible for Social Security benefits for the income earned as park district workers. The pension crisis is because the Park District knows that their contribution rate was too low to cover their pension obligations for years. Second, they unlawfully tried to require employees to increase their contribution by another 3% and it was ruled unconstitutional. Lastly, it is dishonest to double the cost of health insurance for workers not because the cost of healthcare is going up (which they are projecting to go up only 17% over the life of the proposed contract), but to use a backdoor approach to try to get done through negotiations what they couldn't get done legally through the pension contribution."

Under the Park District's current proposal part-time attendants would still make about \$3 per hour less for doing the same job as full-time attendants. Part-time Instructors would still make about \$5 per hour less than full-time Instructors doing the same job. And Recreation Leaders would have to wait until 2021 to get \$15.

Park Management is also proposing 1 week of vacation after 7 years of work, which means no vacation for the first 7 years. "It is unacceptable that they are not willing to provide part-time workers with the same amount of paid vacation as other workers prorated based on regular hours. It's unacceptable that they're not willing to provide the same amount of paid vacation that they offer to themselves," said Alcott. "They also don't want to provide part-time workers with paid holidays and access to health insurance."

"Chicago Park workers have not been offered a good deal by the Park District and the city. Even Mayor Lightfoot has acknowledged that we have been 'chronically underpaid.' Chicago Park Workers have been left behind. We're going on strike because we've had enough. We want to be able to afford to live in the city that we love and is required of us to live in. We have always been here for the kids, we are always there. And will continue to be," said Becky Kliber, a park supervisor for Welles Park.

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