



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SEIU Local 73 Cook County Workers End Strike, Winning Substantial Victories in Tentative Agreement

Certain Economic Issues Head to Arbitration

CHICAGO, Ill.— After more than 10 months of negotiations, Cook County workers represented by SEIU Local 73 have entered a tentative agreement with the county on most issues, ending an 18-day strike. Two economic issues related to raising the wage floor for lowest-paid workers and changing anniversary pay raise steps to reward longevity will move into interest arbitration, which was not an option available until workers went on strike.

The more than 2,500 Cook County workers under the Offices of the President, County Clerk, County Sheriff, and Cook County Health will be going back to work on Tuesday, July 13 or their next scheduled shift.

“Cook County workers showed real bravery by going out on strike to demand respect from the county. This contract has real wins for workers that they should be proud of as it turns the page on decades of Local 73 members being considered second-class citizens at the county,” said **Dian Palmer, SEIU Local 73 President**. “These are the essential, frontline workers that kept our county running during the worst pandemic of our lifetime who stood up for themselves, their families, and the communities they serve, during this strike to demand better. We’re building a fighting union together and we’re determined to build a movement -- not just a moment -- for greater access to public healthcare and the overall services for the citizens of Cook County.”

“This fight gave us courage, taught us how to fight, and to believe in ourselves. The issue was never about going to work, it was about the conditions we were working in,” said **Sylvia Kizer, Building Service Worker at Stroger Hospital**. “We built solidarity across the County, job titles, education levels, and we became family. I can walk around with my head held high. This is a movement not a moment, and we will never be the same.”

In the partial tentative agreement, Cook County workers won better pay equity across multiple areas of the county, hazard pay for certain workers during the pandemic, and prioritizing seniority in hiring and promotions. Per the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act (IPLRA), a panel of arbitrators headed by a neutral party will determine the remaining terms.

“Because this is a universal contract, most departments won everything they were fighting for. For us at the County Jail, this was a win,” said **Shadonna Davis, Rehabilitation Worker at the Cook County Jail**. “The strike was a sacrifice that many of us made and it paid off. It’s a shame that Preckwinkle forced us to go out on strike for 18 days when she could have given us the same agreement as the other unions.”

“The fight was long with great sacrifice but we prevailed,” said **Rev. Jim Phipps, Custodian of Records of Cook County**. “We prevailed for those that could not speak for themselves. We made it so that the power structures can no longer take advantage of us because we are organized with a great union that is fighting for the good of all.”

The predominantly Black and brown, mostly female workers, have been in negotiations for more than 10 months and working without a contract since Dec. 1, 2020. Starting on June 25, 2021, this 18-day strike is the longest in Local 73 history and the longest public sector strike in Chicago in recent memory. County workers also participated in a one-day strike on Dec. 22, 2020, in the weeks after the previous contract initially expired.

“The fact that the Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle refuses to settle a fair deal on the entire contract and accept a return to work agreement that respects Cook County workers speaks for itself,” said Palmer.

For the remaining issues, Local 73 will go through the process of putting our proposal before a panel of arbitrators to review the facts of the contracts County President Toni Preckwinkle and her negotiating team agreed to with the other unions. By standing firm and staying on strike for 18 days, workers were able to make interest arbitration a possibility to resolve these outstanding issues. We are confident the arbitrators will ultimately find that the workers represented by Local 73 deserve the same contract gains that Toni Preckwinkle settled on with other unions that represent Cook County workers.

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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.