



For Immediate Release

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Cook County Director of Labor Relations Misleads Commissioners on Local 73 Contracts

Chicago, IL – Despite assurances from Cook County President Preckwinkle that SEIU Local 73’s contracts would be on the Dec. 16 County Board agenda, County Director of Labor Relations LeShon DeFell claimed the contracts must wait until an independent arbitrator rule on outstanding issues. DeFell reiterated her point in a memo to commissioners following the board meeting.

“It is disappointing to us that Commissioners did not feel the need to investigate further or question DeFell instead allowing her dishonest and partial representation to pass without interrogation,” said Dian Palmer, President of SEIU Local 73. “This smacks of pure retaliation and punishment for our 18-day strike last summer.”

“When I spoke with President Preckwinkle in November, she assured me our contracts would be on the board agenda for December 16.”

As a result of that call, two Zoom meetings were held on Nov. 16 and 23, between the Cook County Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) and Local 73, to determine what was needed to get the contracts on the agenda outside of the normal course of business. Local 73 clearly asked if we could not meet all of the demands of BHR to finalize and get the signed contracts, could we at least reach an agreement on the payment of the \$3,000 lump sum payments and were told there was no way to agree to paying the lump sum absent ratification of the contracts.

BHR states the Union needed to approve all nine finalized, redlined contracts and have them signed. These were submitted on Nov. 29.

BHR then said the contracts would need to go to the separate elected offices for signature, which BHR sent at the end of business on Friday, December 10 to the elected offices. BHR stated it was the Union’s responsibility to gather employer signatures and claimed that in the case of the Public Administrator and Treasurer, BHR did not know to whom to send the agreements for signature.

BHR further informed the Union that unless all nine agreements were signed that they would not put them on the agenda for the Dec. 16 County Board Meeting. Of the nearly

2,500 Local 73 represented workers, less than 20 work for the Public Administrator and Treasurer combined.

DeFell first mentioned the need for a memorandum of agreement to go outside the “normal course of business” on Tuesday, Dec. 14 but did not present to the Union a draft of a proposed MOA.

Furthermore, DeFell failed to define a 'business-related justification' which she claims is required to go outside the normal course of business.

“There are numerous business-related justifications included in our contracts,” said Palmer. “From the cost and coverage of health insurance to pay for specific titles to establish equal pay for equal work.”

“These essential employees have kept Cook County running throughout the pandemic and have been working without a contract for more than a year,” said Palmer. “The least the County could have done was suspend their rules and provide them the lump sum payments that were agreed upon.”

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SEIU Local 73 represents more than 31,000 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.