



For Immediate Release

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Students and Workers Denounce University of Illinois' Continued Assault on First Amendment Rights, SEIU Local 73 Files Complaint under Open Meetings Act

Chicago, IL – Local 73 members held a press conference to announce legal action against the University and speak out against being silenced by management.

On Monday, September 18, SEIU Local 73 filed a complaint with the Illinois Attorney General's office against the University of Illinois after Local 73 Vice President and UIC Worker Lavitta "Vee" Steward was denied an opportunity to testify in front of the Board of Trustees during their July 20 public meeting. Last summer, Local 73 filed a federal lawsuit against the University of Illinois after the Board of Trustees denied workers at Champagne-Urbana the right to speak at a Board meeting.

"Civil Service Jobs used to empower the community. They used to uplift Black and brown working-class families and provide economic stability. But today, UIC has over 800 vacant civil service positions that are supposed to be represented in our bargaining unit. How is that? That ain't right. This leads to many of us being overworked and underpaid. So I requested time to speak during public comments at the July 20 Board of Trustees meeting in Chicago because I wanted to talk about contract negotiations, how workers like me could partner with UIC to restore [Civil Service] jobs back to their former glory, however, my request was denied." spoke Lavitta "Vee" Steward.

The Board of Trustees is a 13-member unelected board that oversees the entire University of Illinois system, including its \$7 billion budget, and ultimately determines the quality of the jobs for all University of Illinois System workers.

Building Service Workers have also been speaking out against privatization, toxic working conditions, and staffing shortages; on September 7, the entire first shift of BSWs at UIC's Hospital at UI Health confronted the Director of Facilities Management with a petition demanding UIC respect BSWs. Already, UIC has spent nearly a quarter of a billion dollars on private contracts with custodial staffing agencies in the last ten years.

"Since the pandemic, Building Service Workers like me have seen our jobs outsourced. There are 800 vacant Civil Service positions and management says they can't find

anyone to hire, so they turn to agency staffing. Why can't we have a voice at the table with the University instead of a dictatorship?" said 25-year UIC Building Service Worker Toya Sevier. "These vacancies are impacting our lives and our jobs. If the University has money to spend on outsourcing, then they should have money to put more equipment in the buildings and more money invest in their workers."

"It's a shame that we have administrators that do not respect the work that Civil Service workers put in – day in and day out – to do the work of those 800 vacant positions. And we demand that they fill these vacancies with union workers – no more privatization. We cannot allow a public university to resort to these kinds of practices. Democracy dies in these types of environments, when we silently the other way when we see injustices," said Alderman Byron Sigcho-Lopez.

"UIC is attacking the basic right to free speech when they deny people – especially unions and student groups – the right to testify in front of the Board of Trustees. We've experienced this first hand; UIC Students for a Democratic Society has been denied the right to speak many times by UIC's Admin when we try to fight for the rights of workers and students," said Liz Rathburn, a member of Students for a Democratic Society.

Local 73 has been in contract negotiations with UIC since June.

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SEIU Local 73 represents more than 35,000 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.