



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Chicago Park District Workers Speak Against Park Disinvestments and Demand a Fair Contract at Board Meeting**

**Chicago, IL** – Ahead of the Chicago Park District Board meeting, workers represented by SEIU Local 73 held a press conference demanding a union contract that reverses disinvestments by addressing understaffing and an overall decline in services.

Low wages and a lack of benefits have driven a staffing crisis that's resulted in a 30% decrease in the number of programs offered by the Park District and a 50% jump in waitlists, according to SEIU Local 73's research.

"Nearly 2/3rds of Chicago Park District workers are part-time and receive no health insurance. Our workers are required to live in the City of Chicago, and surviving on a little more than \$16/hr is a significant challenge when providing for a family. SEIU Local 73 has a plan to revive our parks: it starts with a fair contract that respects, protects, and pays Park District workers what they're worth," said SEIU Local 73 Executive Vice President Jeffrey Howard.

"Recently, we were so short staffed at Fosco Park that I had to work 13 hours after two lifeguards called out and we couldn't find coverage. This hasn't just happened to me; most Park District locations barely have any staff working to cover the pool. It's time for Park District management to take action and address the staffing crisis by providing lifeguards with competitive pay," said Lili He, Hourly Natatorium Instructor at Fosco Park.

"As a 25 year Chicago Park District employee, I am here to tell you that we are done with mismanagement. When I first started, programs were our focus and we accommodated everyone. Today, we are struggling to keep our doors open and provide services to the community. We demand a fair contract now that will break the chains of inequity in our Parks System, including its workforce," said Venus Valino, SEIU Local 73 Member Vice President and Park Supervisor at Cornell Square Park.

SEIU Local 73 represents over 2,200 Park District workers and has been in contract negotiations since June 2023. Park District workers are demanding:

- Competitive Pay increases for all and rewarding longevity with pay increases
- \$20/hr. minimum start rate of pay
- More monthly (full-time) positions
- Insurance for all
- Fair and transparent promotions process

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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.*