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**CONTACT:** Eric Bailey, [ebailey@seiu73.org](mailto:ebailey@seiu73.org)

## **Strike History of UIUC Building and Food Service Workers**

**Champaign, IL** – The history of contract negotiations between Food Service and Building Service Workers and the University of Illinois—Urbana Champaign (UIUC) has been long and contentious. The last time the workers went on strike was in 2013, which lasted three days before management agreed to a contract.

Since then, the workers represented by SEIU Local 73 have overwhelmingly voted to strike each time, including in 2017, 2019, 2022, and now again in 2024.

“The chancellors and presidents of the U of I system continually disrespect its workers and the work we do to keep these campuses running,” **said Melody Decker, Chapter 119 President and Building Service Worker.** “The short staffing in our departments is a direct result of their unwillingness to provide us with a living wage. Every time our contracts are up, we have to beg, plead, and fight for them to give us a few more pennies in our paychecks. They truly are deplorable!”

The history of striking for a fair contract within the University of Illinois system is prevalent in Chicago and Champaign. SEIU Local 73 workers at UIC held a 10-day strike in 2019, and workers there overwhelmingly approved striking this year before contract agreements were reached. UIC workers also voted to authorize a strike in 2024.

Research by the University of Illinois Project for Middle-Class Renewal reveals that public university employees are paid 21% less than their counterparts at other state agencies. Meanwhile, U of I President Timothy Killeen is among the top-ten highest paid public university presidents with a \$1.3 Million salary for FY2024-2025.

“If we coached football, Chancellor Jones wouldn’t hesitate to give us the raises we’re asking for,” **said Dena Gary, Head Cook and Bargaining Team Member.** “Every day, we keep these buildings clean and safe. We keep the students and staff fed with healthy meals. We are essential to keeping this university running, but apparently, the work we do is not worthy of respect from them.”

University faculty, staff, students, and community leaders have been demonstrating support for the Food and Building Service Workers in their fight for a fair contract.

Unfortunately, recent actions by university management continue to demonstrate their devaluation of the workers including requiring physician confirmation for any sick time taken, in violation of the existing collective bargaining agreement and the Illinois Education Labor Relations Act. In addition, they appear to have declared a state of emergency to suspend Civil Service Rules allowing them to assign other workers to do the work of Food Service and Building Service Workers.

“It’s ironic that management seems to feel that the services our members provide are essential enough to suspend the rules and keep them going, but not so essential that they would be willing to pay these workers a living wage,” **said Joseph Richert, SEIU Local 73 Secretary-Treasurer.** “Despite management’s actions this week, we remain hopeful they will come to the table with a reasonable offer after our members have twice voted down their contract proposals. We are fully prepared to strike for as long as it takes to secure a contract that provides these workers with a living wage.”

Bargaining is scheduled for Friday, September 20.

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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.*