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MEDIA RELEASE

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Contact: Diego Mendez

dmendez@seiulocal2.ca

1-416-476-7762

“More respect for our hard work”: Janitors launch campaign demanding better pay and work conditions during COVID-19

The Service Employees International Union Local 2 has launched the Invisible to Essential campaign, calling on property owners, managers and cleaning contractors to work together to make immediate improvements to cleaner’s working conditions. SEIU Local 2 represents more than 10,000 janitors across Canada.

“I have to work even though there is great risk to my own health,” said Vilma Lopez, a janitor working in Burnaby, BC. “We are providing an important service to the public and deserve more respect for our hard work.”

The campaign demands include an immediate \$2 per hour raise; keeping cleaners employed during the crisis; and ensuring all cleaners are working safely with the required training and Personal Protect Equipment (PPE).

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many invisible service workers being thrust into the spotlight. Despite this, janitors continue to be amongst the lowest paid and most underappreciated workers in our society. Janitors say every worker needs to earn enough to pay the bills, job protection, and appropriate health safeguards.

Slim Gedeon cleans City Hall in the nation’s capital. “At least now society understands how important and essential we are,” he says. “We are the ones disinfecting to keep our city safe. I am constantly disinfecting elevator buttons, doorknobs and working hard to ensure the virus does not spread.”

Janitors face the triple threats of layoffs, low wages, and health impacts of COVID-19. They ensure our essential workplaces are kept clean, including healthcare facilities, public transportation systems, airports, vital shopping locations, courthouses, morgues, parcel delivery facilities, police stations, office buildings, and more. Janitors will also be deep cleaning our shutdown workplaces to ready them for the return of the public when the time comes. These include the schools, colleges, and universities our



children attend.

The janitors' union has been in contact with employers since the beginning of the crisis, ensuring all required safety measures were being met. Most recently an open letter was delivered addressing the government's new position on mask-wearing.

"People say that we are important, but do they really treat us that way?" Gedeon wonders.

In just a few days, a public petition supporting the janitors' demands has received over one thousand signatures. More information can be accessed at: www.justiceforjanitors.ca/campaigns/from-invisible-to-essential/

SEIU Local 2 represents janitors in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.



2600 Skymark Ave.
Bldg 2, Suite 200
Mississauga, ON L4W 5B2
1-800-663-6841 · 905-602-7477
Fax 905-602-7476

572 Arthur St. W.
P.O. Box 32001
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 0A1
1-888-887-5343 · 807-473-9651
Fax 807-473-3632

303 Waverley St W
Ottawa, ON
K2P 0V9
613-567-3528
Fax 613-567-0924

7128 Gilley Avenue
Burnaby, BC
V5J 4X2
604-540-7774
Fax 604-540-7779

163 Wyse Road,
Lower Level
Dartmouth, NS B3A 1M5
902-455-1095
Fax 902-455-1855