



MEDIA RELEASE

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Contact: Diego Mendez

dmendez@seulocal2.ca

416-476-7762

Thousands of Toronto area cleaners could be heading to a strike: vote to take place Saturday

SEIU Local 2 janitors say cleaning companies are refusing to provide wage increases that keep up with the cost of living

TORONTO – Janitors in Toronto will be holding a strike vote on Saturday April 30. The cleaners, members of the Service Employees International Union Local 2, say they have been working hard to get a fair contract from the cleaning companies they work for, but the employers are refusing to provide wage increases that keep up with the cost of living.

“Inflation has caused everything to go up,” says Olga da Cruz, who works for Hallmark Housekeeping Services and has been cleaning in the heart of the financial district for close to a decade. “Groceries, fish, meat, rent, gas, clothing, school supplies, everything!”

The janitors, most of whom have worked tirelessly through the pandemic without any kind of pandemic pay, clean healthcare facilities, public transportation systems, courthouses, morgues, parcel delivery facilities, police stations, commercial office buildings, shopping malls, food courts, post-secondary institutions, private schools, airports, and more. While the top rate is \$16.45 most earn \$15.70 per hour. Some earn an additional 50 cents per hour for overnight shifts or lead hand premiums.

According to recent reports inflation has now jumped to a 31-year high of 6.7%. All workers are experiencing first-hand the steep rise in the cost of living, but no one is being impacted like low-wage workers. At the cleaners’ current wages, even basic necessities are getting out of reach.

“Most of my co-workers are working two jobs to be able to pay the bills now,” says Erna Bearneza, who works for GDI Integrated Facility Services at a facility owned by one of the major banks. She’s been cleaning the facility for 10 years.

303 Waverley Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0V9
P 613-567-3528
F 613-567-0924

572 Arthur St. W., POB 32001
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 0A1
Toll 1-888-887-5343
P 807-473-9651
F 807-473-3632

SEIU 2 - Head Office
2600 Skymark Ave, 2-200
Mississauga, ON L4W 5B2
Toll 1-800-663-6841
P 905-602-7477
F 905-602-7476
seulocal2.ca

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

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

"We need to show the companies that we are prepared to fight united to protect all our families," says Gloria Pozo, who works for Amphora Maintenance Services and has been cleaning near Bay Street and Richmond for 16 years. "If it's necessary to vote for a strike, we will vote to strike."

SEIU Local 2 represents over 4,000 cleaners in the Greater Toronto Area. Over 2,500 of them work for companies currently negotiating at a central table with the Union. This central table sets the standard for the entire industry.

BACKGROUND

In the early days of the pandemic, cleaners went from invisible to being called essential. They continue to be amongst the workers protecting public health and safety during the COVID-19 crisis. That however has had no impact on their pay.

"Not only did we not get any pandemic pay," says Mark Dayao, who works for Best Service Pros at Humber College, "our workloads also increased as deeper cleaning was required."

Janitors have historically faced an uphill battle to be recognized for the important work they do for public health and safety. Their wages have been kept low as working conditions deteriorated. To maximize their profits, property owners & managers, including governments and pension funds, have created a competitive-bidding model that puts downward pressure on wages and pushes janitors to be do more and more, often with less staff and less time.

www.J4JPledge.ca

SEIU Local 2 represents over 18,000 essential workers in Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Alberta. We are proud members of the largest, fastest growing, and most dynamic union in North America.

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