

## **SEIU Local 140 Newsletter 12.8.22**

### **Membership meeting**

We will have our monthly membership meeting this Saturday at 10am at the SEIU office and [online](#). We will discuss getting ready for bargaining, next steps in the COVID leave campaign, starting a social media page and more. There will be breakfast and coffee.

### **COVID leave rally recap**

Night custodians rallied outside the PESC district building Tuesday morning to demand COVID pay. A crowd of about a dozen of us including workers and community members gathered outside to hear speeches and testimony explaining the urgent need for paid COVID leave. After doing some chants, we attempted to enter the building.

We intended to deliver our petition in person to HR and speak directly with Genevieve Rough about why this is a critical issue for PPS workers. A security guard at the door informed us that we couldn't protest inside the building and they locked the main entrance. Other visitors had to go around the building to another door to enter. More security personnel appeared while we demanded to be allowed to enter. We explained that we weren't trying to "protest" in the building but rather meet with HR in our capacity as employees of the district. They still refused to let any of us enter the building and told us to "talk to our union." We explained that we were the union and asked for them to at least send someone outside to meet with us. Although they said someone would come out, it became clear after waiting for a bit that nobody from HR was in fact coming out and they were just trying to wait us out knowing we all had to go to work later in the day.

We did, however, see Frank Leavitt watching us through the upstairs windows and taking pictures. Before dispersing we tried calling HR and left a voicemail with Roshni Sabedra explaining our reasons for being there and that we were prevented from entering the building. Later in the day, we discovered that the two of us who tried to use our badges to unlock the doors at PESC had our badges deactivated.

If you think you are being retaliated against, especially if it is for union activities, it is important to reach out to a shop steward! Retaliation is illegal, but we know the district is not above these tactics and we have ways to fight back. Although we did not get to meet with anyone, we were successful at getting the district's attention and showing them we will not back down. It is clear that they are scared of us, even though we are only asking for a simple 5 days of paid COVID leave! Let's continue to make the district uncomfortable until they agree to our demands!

### **The following is a speech that was delivered at the rally:**

I've been working for PPS since March of this year. I got sick with Covid in July, just after our COVID leave agreement with the district had expired. Despite being in good health and being

vaccinated as well as boosted, I got sick with some of the worst flu symptoms that I've ever experienced. There were a few days when I had so little energy that I could barely get out of bed. I got sick the week of the Fourth of July, so I didn't have to use any time off for that Monday. I talked to my FOM on the phone after calling in sick and he told me about the standard requirement of having to take five days off, and being able to go back after that with a mask. Since I had only been with the district for a handful of months, I had used up all of my sick days by the time that week was over. I went back to work because I didn't feel like using my other time off but honestly still felt tired. If I'd had paid COVID leave on top of sick leave, it would have been nice to have even a few extra days that next week to recover more and get my energy back for what you all know is a highly physically demanding occupation.

It is outrageous that we should accept the narrative that the pandemic is over. COVID is still impacting our schools, and some experts have predicted that there will be another surge in COVID cases this winter. Alongside the COVID crisis, custodians and other PPS essential workers have to deal with the flu and RSV that have especially severe impacts on young children. These respiratory illnesses have put more stress on our healthcare workers who have already been through so much these last couple of years. Isolation pay is an essential part of keeping our schools and families healthy.

As we continue to demand paid Covid leave, I also want to say that I stand in solidarity with the railroad workers asking for paid sick leave for the same reasons. Railroad workers who have extremely dangerous and stressful jobs have been fighting for better working conditions but especially for better sick leave. There's also a massive strike of University of California workers going on right now. I hope that as we get busier and more focused on bargaining as the time approaches, we can make time to stand in solidarity with other workers' struggles as well, whether it's healthcare workers, railroad workers, or members of the other unions in PPS.

We should never meet the district on their terms, and instead always continue pushing back on their narratives with our own experiences. It can be hard not to feel defeated sometimes with union or other forms of activism. Yes, it can be hard when we put up with so much day to day and then when the district ignores us for months. But if we can find ways to have fun while causing trouble for the district, that's always something we can celebrate. What I'm getting at is it's critical that we get inspiration from and support these current labor struggles. And that we refuse to let the district set the terms for our demands. Thank you all for coming out today.

### **Coming up**

- Membership meeting Saturday 12/10 at 10am at 525 NE Oregon Street or on [zoom](#)
- Board meeting Tuesday 12/13 at 6pm at PESC, 501 N Dixon St