

# SEIU Local 140 Newsletter 8.13.23

## Take Action!

- Join New Seasons workers rallying for a fair contract Monday 8/14, 10am, Revolution Hall
- Attend our next bargaining session Friday 9/1 at 1pm at the SEIU building
- File an OSHA [complaint](#) if PPS doesn't take appropriate [actions](#) during hot conditions. Note that even if conditions aren't extremely hot in all buildings, the district has an obligation to monitor the heat index, and communicate the steps that they are taking to protect workers.

## Union Updates

### Rally at Board Meeting

This Tuesday over 100 members of SEIU, PAT, PFSP, DCU and supporters rallied before the board meeting [in support of our bargaining platform](#) and to highlight the district's continued failure to address a toxic culture of sexual harassment. SEIU is proposing a starting wage of \$25/hr for entry level custodians and nutrition service workers. Roberta Packer spoke out about her experience getting promoted and losing all her longevity after over 20 years of service. Judi Combs, a former custodian, took the mic to share how she was recently fired in her probationary period after being out sick all week despite having a doctor's notice. Nichet Newsom from the DCU also spoke as well as a member of PAT to share their solidarity. In a statement to the media, PPS claimed that our proposal for living wages is "simply not sustainable."

As the crowd filled the board meeting, many holding signs, the board began their business with barely the slightest acknowledgement of the packed room. In the public comment period, a [PFSP member](#) gave a moving testimony of being repeatedly harassed in their workplace and being told that there was nothing the district could do about it. [Ryan Healy](#) from the DCU discussed the district's maintenance backlog and the state of our public education facilities in the context of tradespeople who aren't paid well and are getting burnt out after constantly fixing things after they break instead of proactively maintaining them.

This board meeting, the designated union speaking period was put at the end. As the time approached for the various union speakers to have their say, the board appeared to be dragging their feet, despite having been very timely with the rest of the agenda. Time took on a surreal quality as the "audience" was given plenty of time to admire the abstract art pieces dangling above the seating in the atrium of PEC. Various committees gave their presentations, with the monotonous proceedings going on for at least a full 20 minutes after the unions were scheduled to speak. This included navel gazing consisting of anecdotes from their recent retreat where they shared their favorite experiences. Suddenly keeping to the schedule was forgotten. At one point someone in the crowd said loudly "Let the unions speak!" and this remark was met with snapping and a few claps.

Finally Amy Silvia, Angela Bonilla, John MacDuffee, and Charlotte Fisher [testified on behalf of SEIU, PAT and PFSP](#). Silvia described what workers are dealing with and presented our bargaining support petition to the board members. She also brought up the district's ongoing refusal to deal with sexual assault and harassment and described steps that could be taken to hold the district accountable. Bonilla called out the district for putting the union speaking slot at the end of the meeting and described educators in our schools getting frustrated with unhealthy and stressful conditions. She also pointed out how the board had approved a 3% cost of living increase for administrators in contrast to their disrespect for the unions there. Compare this with their 2.5% pay increase that has been their best offer for nutrition service workers and teachers so far. John shared about the often overlooked roles that PFSP members such as paraeducators and secretaries play in keeping the district functioning. Charlotte expressed solidarity with those who have courageously spoken up about sexual harassment and various forms of discrimination. Charlotte described how all these individuals have been told that there is a "zero tolerance policy" for harassment, only to face retaliation or be told that there is some kind of investigation without any real results. All speakers emphasized the importance of solidarity and working together across unions.

## **Bargaining Update**

The bargaining team met again Friday 8/4 and worked on clarifying our priorities in bargaining. We agreed that our proposals for wages, healthcare for part time workers, staffing and safety, inclement weather pay, stable job assignments, and vacation for NS workers were the top priorities that we will focus on in future sessions.

Management still has not responded to our proposal to get healthcare for part time workers. We are trying to ensure that part time workers who make too much to qualify for OHP will be covered by PPS. The lack of healthcare for part time workers is a major concern for the bargaining team, especially since it is likely a major factor related to hiring and retaining workers.

Our second major topic of discussion was around staffing and cleaning standards for custodians. District lawyer Chris Duckworth emphasized on multiple occasions that staffing is "budget driven" and claimed the district was not interested in tying staffing standards to cleaning expectations. The bargaining team is hoping to address the chronic short-staffing in both custodial and nutrition service departments which often forces workers to do the work of multiple people because there is no one to fill in when an employee calls out. The district is claiming that both departments are nearing being "fully staffed" but clearly fully staffed is only based on budgeted positions, not actual labor needs.

The bargaining team also discussed the recent termination of a probationary employee just a few days after she filed a harassment complaint against her manager. This seems to be another clear case of retaliation despite the district's claims that it upholds a "no tolerance" policy and does not permit retaliation "of any kind." We sent an email to HR and the school board to express our concerns to about this continued pattern, especially since we had recently had a meeting with Genevieve Rough about these very same issues.

Hours before the board meeting on Tuesday, Genevieve responded to our email claiming that, “there was no retaliation and no conspiracy; rather, the termination decision was based on legitimate work-related reasons.” She also claimed that the decision to terminate the employee was made on the 27th, the exact day of the incident of harassment. Genevieve concluded her email stating, “we disagree with you that PPS has terminated female employees for speaking up against harassment.”

## **Update on Surveillance Cameras**

On August 10, Genevieve Rough responded to an information request from SEIU regarding surveillance cameras at PPS. In response to the question of how long cameras have been installed in custodial breakrooms, she claimed “we have not been able to locate information showing the initial date that cameras were installed at PPS in custodial work areas.” Genevieve refused to answer where cameras are located in individual schools, explaining that the request is, “overbroad, overburdensome, seeks confidential information, and would jeopardize PPS’s management interest in maintaining security of its facilities.” When asked if PPS has used footage from security cameras to discipline custodians, she cited two examples and suggested, “there may be additional examples we may locate with more time to search.”

Genevieve concludes her response by rejecting the union’s demand to bargain over the use of security cameras in custodial workspaces. Normally, when there are changes in conditions of employment, workers have a right to bargain over those changes. It seems as though installing temporary security cameras in custodial break rooms is a change in conditions that we should have the right to bargain over. Clearly PPS does not see it this way and is attempting to avoid the issue. With the district set to install thousands of new security cameras throughout all their buildings, it is important that we understand the district’s use of footage and fight to make sure we have a say in district policies regarding surveillance.

## **Who is Rebekah Jacobson?**

PPS claims to have hired an “independent” investigator to look into allegations that the district is violating its sexual harassment policy. SEIU was recently given notice that the district hired Rebekah Jacobson from [Garrett Hemann Robertson P.C.](#) She has begun reaching out to workers who have filed complaints alleging sexual harassment at PPS. In one such meeting, SEIU members posed questions to Jacobson to learn more about her role in this investigation. This is what we learned:

- Jacobson has worked for PPS in the past representing the district in labor arbitration cases.
- She is working with Genevieve Rough and the Assistant General Counsel [Kate Wilkinson](#) who sat next to Guerrero at Tuesday’s board meeting. Kate Wilkinson made \$193,000 last year in her role at PPS and has previously worked as the HR director at “Oregon’s largest independent grocery store company.”
- Jacobson is only investigating individual cases which HR forwards to her. She will make individual reports based on those individual cases. She is not looking into past complaints.

- It sounds like she is being tasked to handle new sexual harassment complaints rather than the district's HR staff who normally handle these. She will make confidential reports to the district but is not required to disclose the reports to the unions.

We still have a lot of questions about what exactly her role is and what the district's intentions are. Regardless, it is safe to say that PPS hiring Jacobson does not fulfill the demand we set to have an independent audit into the district's past and present practice of addressing sexual harassment. We will continue to hold the district accountable to its own sexual harassment policy, provide meaningful in-person harassment prevention training, and initiate a truly independent audit of the district's compliance with anti-harassment policy and laws.