

MAKING WORK PAY IN NEWARK

Mayor Booker Announces Prevailing Wage Initiative for Workers Contracted to Clean City Buildings

The New York Times

February 9, 2007

B3

More Big Changes on Way For Newark, Booker Vows

Some of the new initiatives he announced have long been familiar to other large American cities... pushing new rules that would require contractors who do business with the city to pay “prevailing wages” to their employees, a measure that would effectively double incomes for most workers.

“We know it will cost more for city contracts, but we must end the hypocrisy,” [Mayor Booker] said, referring to the status quo, in which scores of City Hall custodians have no benefits and earn slightly more than minimum wage.

In his State of the City address on February 8th, Newark Mayor Cory Booker announced an important step toward making work pay in his city. A proposed law would require contractors hired to clean city buildings to pay their workers prevailing wages and benefits set by the State of New Jersey, currently \$14.92 an hour plus \$3.01 an hour in benefits. Last January, New Jersey passed a similar law that applies to state contracts.

Without such laws, governments often award cleaning contracts to the lowest bidder, causing a race to the bottom on wages. Prevailing wage laws open contracts to responsible cleaning companies and force competition to be based on quality of service, while ensuring living wages and benefits for workers.

“In my first hours in City Hall I met Carmen, a member of the janitorial staff who cleaned the Mayor’s Office. She came early, left late, and always worked hard. It came to my attention that she was a member of a contracted cleaning crew -- a non-city employee hired by a company to clean our offices. She was doing the exact same job that city janitorial staff performs, but was paid less than half as much and enjoyed no health benefits. We brought her over to the city payroll and now she earns a living that she can support her family with and benefits that offer her security.”

For years she and others who work in this building have experienced a terrible double standard...City Hall must not ask other employers to pay a living wage for our residents while we continue the practice of paying salaries barely adequate to live on. We must embody our values and lead the way.”

– Mayor Cory Booker
State of the City Address
February 8, 2007



Help fight poverty by supporting prevailing wage laws for your community.

For more information on prevailing wage laws, contact Elizabeth Wilkins at 212-388-3058.