



# NEWS

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SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **CONTRACT TALKS OPEN FOR NEARLY 7,000 CLEANERS IN WASHINGTON, MONTGOMERY COUNTY & BALTIMORE** *- Union Proposals Focus on Increasing Wages & Health Care Coverage -*

**Washington, DC** – Negotiations for a new union contract covering 4,500 commercial cleaners in Washington, D.C., 1,500 cleaners in Montgomery County, Maryland and 700 Baltimore cleaners began on Thursday between Local 32BJ and cleaning contractors who serve the area’s real estate industry. Local 32BJ presented its contract proposals to leaders representing major commercial cleaning companies in the region, including Potomac Red Coats, American Building Maintenance (ABM) and Unicco.

“Washington has one of the strongest and most profitable real estate markets in the nation. The people who work hard to keep these buildings running deserve a piece of the pie,” said Jamie Contreras, Local 32BJ Capital Area Director. “Our proposals ensure the wages and health care coverage cleaners need to support their families.”

Local 32BJ commercial cleaners currently earn wages ranging from \$7.50 in Baltimore and Montgomery County to \$10.55 in Washington. D.C. In addition to securing a fair wage increase, other goals for the contract negotiations include increasing employer-paid benefits.

“Working families living in a city like Washington, with the nation’s second-highest poverty rate and the third greatest income inequality, desperately need higher wages,” said Mike Fishman, Local 32BJ President. “Washington area cleaners – just like cleaners in other cities throughout the region – need to earn wages that will help them get ahead.”

According to the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, the gap between high-wage and low-wage workers in Washington is at an all-time high, as salaries for the lowest-paid workers have remained unchanged over the last 30 years. Furthermore, income inequality in the District is greater than in any city nationwide, other than Tampa and Atlanta.

“We want to offer our families a better future, but that’s hard to do on this salary,” said Oscar Zapata, a Washington area cleaner who earns \$9.75 per hour working for Unicco and has two children. “I always have to choose between paying a bill or seeing a doctor and buying medicine.”

More than 50,000 commercial cleaners from Hartford, CT to Washington, D.C. are united in a campaign to secure new contracts that raise wage and benefit standards. Most contracts, including Baltimore and Montgomery County, are set to expire on December 31, 2007. Failure to reach a new contract could lead to a strike of up to 2,200 building service workers in Montgomery County and Baltimore.

With more than 85,000 members in six states, including 9,000 in the Washington D.C.-Maryland area, Local 32BJ is the largest property service workers union in the country.

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