



# NEWS

SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **FAIRFIELD COUNTY CLEANERS VOTE TO STRIKE**

### *Cleaners Rally in Wintry Weather to Make Work Pay*

Stamford, CT – With their contract set to expire in just over two weeks, one hundred Fairfield County commercial cleaners rallied in downtown Stamford last night. Contract negotiations have been underway since late October for nearly 2,000 Fairfield County office and property service cleaners. The cleaners are seeking for more full-time jobs, wage increases that will help get them ahead of the rising cost of living and fully employer-paid family health insurance for more employees. Stamford Mayor Dannel Malloy voiced his support at the rally.

Following the rally, the cleaners voted unanimously to give their bargaining committee the power to call for a strike, if necessary. The current contract expires at midnight on December 31, 2007.

“Office cleaners simply cannot afford to work and live in Fairfield County without a wage increase that will help their families get ahead of the ever-rising cost of living,” said Kurt Westby, Local 32BJ Connecticut Director. “Local 32BJ is ready to strike if cleaning companies don’t get serious about real wage increases.”

A strike of Fairfield County property service workers could affect nearly 200 buildings across the County, including more than 90 percent of the large commercial office buildings in downtown Stamford. Greenwich Plaza and Office Park, Bridgeport’s People’s Bank, Merritt 7 Corporate Park in Norwalk and the campuses of Fairfield University and UCONN-Stamford could also be affected.

“Office cleaners across the County are forced to run from one part-time job to the next – without being offered benefits at either,” said Westby. “It’s no way to sustain a family or help plan for their retirement and children’s education.”

Since the last contract negotiations in 2003, the Fairfield County real estate market has strengthened as it has become the home to some of the world’s most exclusive financial management firms. According to Cushman & Wakefield, the office space availability rate dropped for the third straight year, marking a 30 per cent decrease from two years ago. At the same time, average rental rates have risen 22 percent in the past year.

“Fairfield County has seen unbelievable growth since our last contract negotiations,” said Mike Fishman, Local 32BJ President. “It’s time for the hard-working men and women who maintain the County’s office buildings to benefit from this growth as well.”

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Meanwhile, workers in Fairfield County face high living expenses, including some of the highest housing costs in the country. To afford a typical two-bedroom apartment, workers need to earn more than \$30 an hour according to the Associated Press. This is increasingly difficult for Connecticut's low wage workers, like office cleaners earning between \$9.50 and \$10.50 an hour, who are experiencing the biggest real wage decrease in the country since 2001 according to the 2007 State of Working Connecticut report.

“Striking is not our first choice – it’s the last,” said Pedro Alba, a member of the bargaining committee. “But we can’t afford to keep working without a real raise.”

Fairfield commercial property service workers are negotiating their contract alongside 1,800 Local 32BJ members in Hartford County and nearly 50,000 Local 32BJ members from four other northeastern states and Washington, DC. Most of the contracts are set to expire on December 31, 2007. Currently, more than 150,000 people - workers and their family members - receive health care through 32BJ commercial contracts.

With more than 85,000 members in six states and Washington, DC, including more than 4,500 in Connecticut, Local 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.

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