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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Lynsey Kryzwick: 917-683-4474

Matt Nerzig: 212-539-2882

Service Employees International Union

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, November 23, 2009

BILL TO HELP SCHOOL CAFETERIA WORKERS MOVES FORWARD

– Senate Labor and Assembly Appropriations Committees Hear Testimony –

Trenton, NJ – Senate Labor and Assembly Appropriations Committee today heard testimony in support of a bill that would reduce school cafeteria workers' reliance on public assistance. Without health care benefits through their job, school cafeteria workers and their families rely on public health programs, which cost taxpayers millions of dollars a year. The bill is sponsored by Senators Sweeney and Madden and Assembly Members Pou, Giblin and Watson-Coleman.

“School cafeteria workers are dedicated to keeping our children healthy and well-fed,” said Kevin Brown, 32BJ New Jersey Director. “These workers aren’t asking for a hand-out; they’re just asking for enough to feed their own kids and support themselves.”

More than 200 million tax dollars a year are spent on public schools food service contracts in New Jersey. The workers employed through these contracts earn an average wage of \$8.15 an hour and rarely receive health care or significant benefits. The food service industry is one of the state’s biggest drains on New Jersey FamilyCare and Medicaid programs with more than 2,700 workers and their family members, many of whom are school cafeteria workers, depending on publicly-funded health care programs. The cost of covering these workers and their families is estimated to be upwards of \$7.3 million.

The bill, S-2850 and A-4151, would amend the current prevailing wage law to cover school cafeteria workers. Based on the federal Service Contract Act rates, the law would require food service contractors to pay workers no less than \$11.75 an hour and provide quality health care coverage.

“I love my job, and I work hard, but it’s just not enough to live on,” said Delores Jakob, a school cafeteria worker in Lumberton, NJ. After a recent visit to the emergency room, Delores applied to CharityCare to help cover her \$7000 bill. “I don’t want charity. I work hard, and I want to be able to pay my own bills.”

At 64 per cent, New Jersey has the second highest rate of contracting for school cafeteria service in the country. Approximately 8,000 workers are employed through these contracts. School cafeteria workers employed directly by school districts generally earn twice as much as contracted workers and also receive health care and other benefits.

With more than 110,000 members in eight states and the District of Columbia, including 1,000 school cafeteria workers in New Jersey, 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.

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