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Service Employees International Union
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GOOD JOBS BILL FOR CLEANERS AT CON-ED, OTHER UTILITIES HEADS TO SENATE FLOOR

– Senate Finance Committee Approves Measure –

Albany, NY—The public utilities good jobs bill (S-7096), which would create good jobs for workers contracted to clean National Grid, Con Edison and other public utility sites, is headed for a Senate floor vote after the Senate Finance Committee voted for the bill today. Cleaners contracted to work at public utilities, who earn as little as \$8.50 an hour at these state-regulated multi-billion dollar utilities, were in Albany today supporting the bill that would guarantee industry standard wages to contracted cleaners and security officers at public utility companies.

“When public utilities like Rochester Gas and Electric and National Grid hire irresponsible contractors that pay poverty wages, it puts an even greater burden on tax payers and perpetuates the cycle of poverty in our communities,” said Jerry Dennis, SEIU Local 200 President.

The Senate bill introduced by State Senator Eric Schneiderman would eliminate the current exemption for public utility companies in the state prevailing wage law, which guarantees publicly-contracted service workers the wages and benefits that are standard in the industry. Since this law was passed in 1971, thousands of workers contracted to clean and secure public buildings and facilities have been able to support their families with good wages and health care.

“Public utilities are bringing in billions of dollars from tax-paying New Yorkers and then keeping working families in poverty,” said State Senator Liz Krueger. “We cannot continue to watch these state-regulated companies hurt our families and our communities.”

Despite skyrocketing profits at public utilities, many contracted cleaners are unable to make ends meet on pay as little as \$8.50 an hour. On top of monthly utility payments, New York taxpayers are paying for public programs for basic necessities like food, health care and housing for low wage, uninsured service workers.

“Public utilities that benefit from a state-regulated monopoly should be creating jobs that benefit New Yorkers,” said Hector Figueroa, 32BJ Secretary Treasurer. “We call on State Senators to vote for the public utility good jobs bill.”

New York’s public utility companies are bringing in billions of dollars in operating revenue from consumers and rate payers. Con Ed, for example, reported \$13 billion in operating revenues for 2009, Rochester Gas reported \$1.01 billion in operating revenue, New York State Electric & Gas Corporation reported \$1.65 billion in operating revenues and National Grid’s reported operating revenues were \$22.4 billion.

“State government should do more to keep multi-billion dollar utility companies from fueling poverty in our communities,” said Assemblyman Gianaris, the prime sponsor of the Assembly bill, A- 10257. “New Yorkers foot the bill when low-wage, uninsured service workers need medical care or are forced to turn to public programs for basic necessities like food or rent.” The bill was voted out of the Senate Labor and Codes Committees last week. A full Senate vote on the bill is expected within a week.

With more than 120,000 members, including 70,000 in New York City, 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.

With more than 13,000 workers in human services, the public sector, education, and building services in 52 Upstate counties, SEIU Local 200 United represents more private human service agency workers than any other union in Upstate New York.