SECURING OUR FUTURE
RAISING INDUSTRY STANDARDS AND
LIFTING UP BALTIMORE
Cover photo: Baltimore’s security officers and community leaders rally for higher standards in the security industry, May 2013
PRIVATE SECURITY OFFICERS IN BALTIMORE are coming together to organize a union with 32BJ SEIU to raise standards in the private security industry in Baltimore and transform low-wage jobs into jobs with decent pay and quality benefits. By transforming their jobs, these security officers will make Baltimore a better city for all who live in it.

- Additional money that security officers earn can be reinvested in their communities, strengthening neighborhood economies;

- As industry standards are raised, fewer security officers will rely on public assistance programs to get by, saving money for taxpayers;

- Experienced security officers that are paid a decent wage, well-trained and treated with respect are more likely to remain at their job and share their experience, making our city safer.

The private security industry is profitable and growing. Yet in Baltimore, pay and benefits in the industry are paltry. Security officers in New York, Washington, DC, New Jersey and Philadelphia have successfully organized a union and raised industry standards in their cities, and the officers of Baltimore are committed to doing the same.
LIKE MOST PROMINENT CITIES, Baltimore is a place of contrasts. Certain downtown buildings along Pratt Street command rents of over $30 per square foot for office space, yet nearly a quarter of Baltimore’s residents live in poverty. Security officers here live on both sides of this divide: they are charged with protecting the city’s people and property, but their wages often hardly cover daily expenses.

However, Baltimore’s security officers have decided to change that, and are organizing a union with 32BJ SEIU. Their goal is to transform private security jobs into good jobs—jobs that provide a decent wage, benefits and proper training—and if they achieve it, Baltimore will be a better city for all of its residents.

THE PRIVATE SECURITY INDUSTRY IS GROWING

The private security industry is growing in Maryland and throughout the United States, and experts predict that the industry will continue to grow—hiring more employees and generating more revenue for years to come.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the number of people employed as security officers in the United States will increase by twelve percent between 2012 and 2022, creating 130,000 new jobs nationwide. Maryland’s Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation predicts that the number of security officers in the state will grow by more than eighteen percent between 2010 and 2020.

MY STORY

Travis Henson-Rollins, security officer
Baltimore, MD

My name is Travis Henson-Rollins, wife and mother to a newborn and ten year-old sons. I began working at Brantley Security on October 26th, 2011. It was definitely a struggle on my body and family but you got to do what you got to do to get the job done. A few weeks went by and after working a consistent schedule my hours changed to 14 hours a week. This was my household’s only source of income at the time, as my husband was laid off that same year.

I want this union more than anything so people like myself and my co-workers are allowed to live comfortably and at peace, knowing that their families are safe and not struggling to make ends meet.
Industry revenues are expected to grow with the industry as a whole. Industry analyst IBISWorld predicts that the private security industry nationwide will experience an annualized growth in revenue of 4.2 percent between 2012 and 2017, reaching $34.6 billion.5

**BALTIMORE NEEDS GOOD JOBS**

Working people across Maryland are struggling, and in Baltimore the difference between rich and poor is particularly acute. A 2012 study by the Brookings Institution found that Baltimore is one of the ten most unequal large cities in the United States. The annual income of households in the 95th percentile group was more than twelve times greater than that of households in the bottom twenty percent, and the difference had grown since 2007.6

Last year Maryland’s statewide unemployment rate was 6.7 percent,7 and over ten percent of Maryland residents were considered to be living in poverty by the Census Bureau.8 However, not all groups felt the impact of unemployment and poverty equally.

- While the unemployment rate for white workers in Maryland was 5.4 percent, 9.7 percent of Maryland’s black workers were unemployed.9
- In 2012 the Census Bureau considered over 10 percent of Maryland residents to be living in poverty. However, black Marylanders were nearly twice as likely as white Marylanders to live in poverty: 16 percent of black Maryland residents live in poverty compared to seven percent of white residents.10
- The difference between black and white residents in the Baltimore metropolitan area was even starker than in the state as a whole. Seven percent of the Baltimore area’s white residents lived in poverty, but 22 percent of black residents did.11

**WHO ARE BALTIMORE’S SECURITY OFFICERS?**

The security workforce in Baltimore is evenly divided between male and female security officers. More than thirty percent of officers who work in Baltimore have at least one child at home, and more than sixty percent live in Baltimore City itself. Though only forty percent of Baltimore’s workforce as a whole is black, 74 percent of security officers working in Baltimore are black, more closely mirroring the population of the city itself.12

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**Poverty and Unemployment are Not Evenly Shared**

![Figure I: Poverty Rates and Unemployment Rates in the State of Maryland and the Baltimore - Towson Metropolitan area, by Race](source)

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IN BALTIMORE, A SECURITY JOB MAY NOT ALWAYS PAY THE BILLS

Baltimore’s security officers often earn low wages and receive few meaningful benefits. The median hourly wage for a security officer in Baltimore, including armed and otherwise specialized security officers, is $13.59. Moreover, according to U.S. Census figures, 36 percent of security officers working in Baltimore do not receive health insurance through their employer or union, compared to only 23 percent for Baltimore’s workforce as a whole.

Some of the costs of these low wages are borne by local taxpayers. Baltimore’s security workforce is much more likely to rely on public assistance to make ends meet than the city’s workforce as a whole. 22 percent of security officers working in the city receive food stamps, while only 7 percent of the city’s workforce as a whole does. While ten percent of the city’s workforce receives health insurance coverage through public programs like Medicaid, 22 percent of Baltimore’s security workforce receives their health care coverage through public programs. These public programs supplement the security industry’s subpar wages and benefits, and ensure that Baltimore’s security officers and their families are able to survive.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has created a “Living Wage Calculator” for localities around the United States by gathering information about the local costs of necessities. Based on the cost of housing, transportation, food and other expenses, their data suggests that for one worker and their child living in Baltimore— and more than sixty percent of the city’s security workforce lives in Baltimore City—a living wage would be $22.88 per hour— nearly twice the median wage of a security officer in the city.

Who are Baltimore’s workers and residents?

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<th>Baltimore City Residents</th>
<th>Baltimore City Security Officers</th>
<th>Baltimore City Workforce</th>
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Figure 2: Comparison of Baltimore City’s residents, security officers, and workforce by gender and race.

Rally for higher standards in the security industry, Baltimore, May 2013
The monthly expenses for one adult and one child living in Baltimore City often add up to far more than a full time security officer earns.

Figure 3: Comparison between the living expenses for one adult and one child living in Baltimore City and the median monthly salary of a security officer in Baltimore City.19

I have not had medical insurance since I have been an employee at Brantley, and there have been times where my bills and other expenses have far exceeded my income and only through the grace of God have I been able to manage to stay afloat.

– Anthony Thompson-Shaw
security officer
Baltimore, MD
The substantial impact of unionization on local economies is well-documented. A 2007 study by the Economic Roundtable found that greater income from unionization in Los Angeles created eleven billion dollars in economic activity and 64,800 jobs.\textsuperscript{23}
MY STORY

Aalias McMullen, security officer
Baltimore, MD

I came to Brantley Security Services back in December of 2011. My first post was standing outside in 13 degree weather, walking back and forth on a closed retail strip. I just knew that it was only a matter of time before I got recognized as a hard working employee and would start getting better posts.

To me, a supervisor is there for the employees to go to with problems or complaints and they will bring it up to management. That was my reasoning for wanting a supervisor’s position. But it quickly became obvious to me that no matter how hard I worked or how long I had been with the company, I was fooling myself to think that I would get a supervisor’s position because management had their own agenda.

Without a union, I feel that I will never get the respect at Brantley that I deserve and have worked so hard for. After more than two years of service, I am one of the company’s longest serving employees yet I am still treated with little regard.
RAISING SECURITY INDUSTRY STANDARDS in Baltimore is a simple approach to some of Baltimore’s most pressing problems. Currently, many security officers who work in Baltimore are struggling to get by, sometimes relying on public assistance to care for themselves and to feed their families. By organizing a union with 32BJ SEIU, security officers working in Baltimore are fighting for more than just an improvement in their working conditions: they are fighting for a better future for their families and their communities.

A private security workforce that is well trained and treated with respect is essential to maintaining public safety. Workers who are paid a fair wage and receive valuable benefits such as affordable, high-quality health insurance and paid sick days are able to strengthen their local communities by spending money locally and keeping themselves, their families and their neighbors healthy. All of these pieces make up a stronger Baltimore.

Security officers are not alone in their fight to improve their communities. In October of 2011, 700 janitors in Baltimore won a new contract with their employers that provided for wage increases while maintaining crucial benefits such as health insurance and paid days off. Moreover, thousands of security officers in New York and Washington, DC have formed a union with 32BJ SEIU and won contracts that have transformed their jobs into good jobs with decent pay, quality benefits and respect. As officers in Baltimore follow their lead, it will change our city for the better.
1. James Briggs, “Baltimore’s Pratt Street is one of the most expensive places in the U.S. to rent office space,” *Baltimore Business Journal*, 09/30/2013.


13. Information on poverty rates in Maryland and the Baltimore-Towson Metropolitan Area drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates for “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: Maryland” and “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: Baltimore-Towson Metropolitan Area.”


\frac{[(13.59 \text{ per hour}) \times (2080 \text{ hours annually})]}{12 \text{ months in year}} = 2,355.60 \text{ per month at median rate.}
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With more than 120,000 members, 32BJ SEIU is the largest union of property service workers in the U.S. We are united to raise standards at work and improve conditions in our communities so that one day “working poor” will be a contradiction in terms. For more information about us visit: www.seiu32bj.org. For more about security officers’ efforts to raise standards, visit: www.respectsecurity.org.