

The Chief

Civil Service LEADER

THE CIVIL EMPLOYEES' WEEKLY

June 3, 2011

Cite Companies' Taints

HHC Votes to Ship Out All Laundry; Union Raps Shift

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DON'T EMBARRASS YOURSELF: District Council 37 Local 420 President Carmen Charles struck an imposing figure outside Brooklyn Borough Hall May 25 as her union rallied to protest the Health and Hospitals Corporation's plan to outsource the Brooklyn Central Laundry. 'The money they claim they'll save is minimal compared to the jobs they will lose,' she said. 'This will come back to be the biggest embarrassment for HHC.'

The Health and Hospitals Corporation May 26 approved the controversial contract to fully close the Brooklyn Central Laundry and give all laundry services to a private vendor, despite District Council 37 Local 420's protest that it was being bamboozled by a company with a history of fraud.

The 8-2 vote came after a union counter-proposal to operate the laundry, which does work for half of the city's hospitals and nursing homes, using existing employees.

Local 420 said that the claims made by the three private companies looking to jointly take

over operations exaggerated the potential savings, which HHC estimates will be \$72 million over nine years.

"Sodexo has a documented history of overbilling and fraud, Unitex has a poor history of fulfilling contracts, and outsourcing raises serious issues with safety and control," the union proposal stated. It cited a \$20-million fine Sodexo paid for overbilling school districts and its recently-canceled contract with the U.S. Marine Corps where \$20 million in savings were promised, and instead the project went over budget by \$329 million.

Blow to the Neighborhood

The DC 37 proposal, which included capital improvements that would save money and plans to expand to other city agencies, would have reduced costs to 82 cents a pound, “a more realistic assessment than Sodexo’s bid,” it claimed. HHC estimates that the laundry currently costs \$1.17 per pound, while DC 37 says it costs \$1.07 per pound. “Closing the BCL and moving remaining employees to the Mount Vernon facility will deal a severe and permanent economic blow to the East Flatbush neighborhood,” DC 37 says it costs \$1.07 per pound. “Closing the BCL and moving remaining employees to the Mount Vernon facility will deal a severe and permanent economic blow to the East Flatbush neighborhood,” DC 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts said in a letter to HHC. “The jobs in Mount Vernon pay far less than the fair wages currently paid to BCL employees.” Unitex workers will earn \$8-10 per hour, versus the \$15-17 an hour BCL employees currently get.

HHC: Retraining Workers

HHC spokeswoman Evelyn Hernandez said that closing the laundry would save \$72 million over nine years, savings that are “not contingent on the vendor’s deals with subcontractors,” dismissing one of the union’s allegations.

“We are prepared to retrain and redeploy the 83 employees who are affected and place them into housekeeping jobs through HHC hospitals at slightly higher salaries,” she said. “The proposed closing of the laundry plant and outsourcing of the work will not affect patients.”

At the protest outside Brooklyn Borough Hall a day prior to the vote, Local 420 was joined by Borough President Marty Markowitz and one of the City Councilmen representing East Flatbush, Mathieu Eugene.

“The money they claim they’ll save is minimal compared to the jobs they will lose,” Local 420 President Carmen Charles said. “Like CityTime, this will come back to be the biggest embarrassment for HHC.”

Mr. Markowitz acknowledged that HHC had offered to keep the BCL employees in a job by moving them to housekeeping jobs in hospitals. “But will these jobs provide the same stability?” He asked. “Will they still be here in a year?”

‘Why Are We Outsourcing?’

He continued, “Why are we outsourcing jobs outside the City of New York when our people are in dire straits...let’s keep the jobs we have, keep them here, keep them strong, keep them union.”

Local 420's new chapter chair for the laundry, Patsy Carter, said that the workers had washed 31,129 pounds of laundry that day and that all of it would be going out to hospitals on time tomorrow. "We might be short-staffed, but you'd never know it," she proclaimed.

The union also protested at HHC headquarters before and during the contract vote, handing out leaflets that underlined the problems faced by Sodexo and Unitex. While Unitex employees are unionized, Sodexo's are not and will likely face even lower wages than \$8-10 an hour.