

# Southern Worker Justice

Newsletter of the Southern Worker Justice Campaign

southernworkerjustice.org

## City Workers Across NC and VA Win BIG Changes During City Budget Campaigns! *Mass action shows we have Union Power!*



*Members of the Newport News City Workers Union rally before the May 24, 2022 City Council budget hearing.*

From January through June city workers across North Carolina and Virginia participated in major campaigns to demand economic justice. Workers participated in dozens of actions starting with a coordinated action in five cities launching the campaign over MLK Holiday weekend in January.

“What do we want? Living wages!!” chanted city workers as they rallied before the Newport News City Council Budget Hearing in on May 24, 2022.

The Newport News City Workers Union, UE has been organizing a campaign to seriously raise the wages this year for city employees. Several hundred workers have signed petitions asking for a complete overhaul of the current pay scale. This was the second rally at City Council meetings this Spring while the budget was being debated.

Union members have also been meeting privately

with several city council allies including David Jenkins, Sharon Scott to discuss our demands and push forward. Additionally, the union leaders met with State Delegate Cia Price to gain her support.

The current Mayor Price has stalled the resolution in support of Collective Bargaining, mostly because he is not running for election in November. This is NOT a legitimate reason!

At the May 24 rally, Council Member Jenkins, our strongest ally, stated that the city council sent the CB proposal down to the city manager, Cindy Rohlf who took it off the table to support.

We need to be strategic about being involved in the upcoming City Council elections on November 8 to vote in a Mayor and City Council. candidates that support the right to collective bargaining. We need your engagement through the summer and fall as we develop this public campaign showing a mass mandate for supporting city workers!

# Newport News City Worker Union Members Speak-Out at City Council Meetings!



## Where did you spend \$36 MILL in Federal COVID relief?

"During COVID, with residents staying home, throwing out huge amounts of trash because management cancelled content restrictions. Our work days often extended 11 hours. With our health and families health being put at risk. We stepped up to the plate to keep streets clean only to receive little compension for enduring these conditions for two years. Where did you spend \$36 million you recieved from Federal government for COVID relief? You didn't spend it on Solid Waste employees. We deserve an explanation."

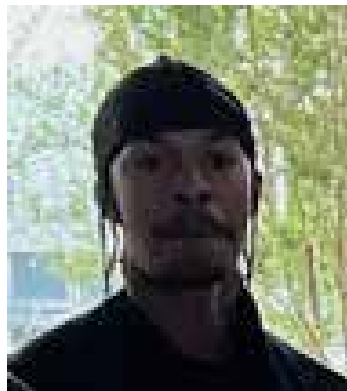
**Martin Carden**, Senior Equipment Operator, Solid Waste, Public Works



## Collective Bargaining is Needed!

"Collective bargaining is needed for our workers due to the fact that cost of living is steady rising. Gas prices continue to rise. We are losing great workers to the private sector due to the lack of income to properly support their families."

**Rodrick Mitchell**, Waste water, AIMS, Public Works



## Employees wages are below poverty rates...

"We need collective bargaining because no one knows what we need more than the employees. Our wages are below poverty rates and we cannot meet the cost of living."

**Dion Haney**, Solid Waste, Public Works



## No one is focusing on Public Works, we deserve better...

"Police department cannot handle a 911 call unless we make it safe for them. Fire fighters can't put out fire unless we make it safe for them. School bus drivers can't drive kids to school unless we make the roads safe. Other local governments are offering raises to workers but I have not heard enough from this council. No one is focusing on Public Works, but we deserve better"

**Keith Graham**, Stormwater, Back and Side, Public Works



# Virginia Beach City Workers Struggle & Win LARGEST RAISE in 20 YEARS!



*Pictured above: Members of the Virginia City Workers Union rally before the April 20, 2022 City Council budget hearing*

The Virginia Beach City Workers Union, UE Local 111 rallied at the Convention Center before the City Council Budget Hearing in on April 20, 2022. We have been organizing a campaign to seriously raise the wages this year for city employees. This was the third rally at City Council meetings this Spring while the budget was being debated including a January rally around MLK holiday and a another rally on March 1.

Union members have also been meeting privately with several city council allies including Sabrina Wooten, Michael Berlucchi, Guy Tower and Aaron Rouse to discuss our demands and push forward.

After the rally on April 20, feeling the mass pressure, Mayor Bobby Dyer and Vice Mayor Rosemary Wilson agreed to meet with worker leaders of the union for the first time ever! This was an important meeting where workers stood firm on our demands, for

- 1) Step Pay Plan that recognizes our years of services,
- 2) Reclassification of all pay scales more than 5% behind market averages, and
- 3) Raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

From the very beginning, the City Manager has only been offering the least expensive options with no real vision to support city workers that have kept the city running through the pandemic and now suffering from major understaffing and crushing inflation.

After all this pressure, Mayor Dyer and Vice Mayor Wilson did issue a Budget Reconciliation Letter on May 3 that outlined what could be the largest raise city workers have ever seen including:

- Step Pay Plan with years of service!!!!
- \$15 minimum wage!!!!
- A minimum of 5% raise for everyone (most will get way more)

The fact that we won 2 out of 3 of our demands and an investment of over \$32 million for city workers shows that we are building serious union! However, the devil is in the details of this budget plan. We must stay united, mobilized and keep pushing forward.

Mayor Dyer had stated at a City Council meeting on September 28, 2021 that he would move forward the process for collective bargaining, however since that date he has not even convened one meeting on the subject. Our union members had to remind him of this when we spoke at City Council meeting in January around the Dr. King Holiday. We had requested meetings with him numerous times, but it took us three public rallies and widespread press coverage to finally get his attention.



*Leaders of the Virginia Beach City Workers Union meet with Mayor Bobby Dyer and Vice Mayor Rosemary Wilson on April 25. Pictured: (Front row) HR rep, Tracy Smigel (Human Services), Pat Thebert (Human Services), Vice Mayor Rosemary Wilson, Brad Belton (Public Works(PWD), Waste Management), and Damel Foreman (PWD, Street Maintenance). (2nd row): Kevin Kirby (PWD, Stormwater), Bakari Miles (PWD, Street Maintenance), Tyrone Hall (PWD, Street Maintenance), (Row 3): Eric Ellerbe (PWD, Street Maintenance), Mayor Bobby Dyer, Derrick Holley (PWD, Street Maintenance), Darin Holley (PWD, Street Maintenance), (Back row): Devon Conley (PWD, Highways/Stormwater), Terry Green (Public Utilities, Water Distribution).*

## Building Worker Power

The fact that we won 2 out of 3 of our demands and an investment of over \$32 million for city workers shows that we are building serious union! However, the devil is in the details of this budget plan. We must stay united, mobilized and keep pushing forward.

Mayor Dyer had stated at a City Council meeting on September 28, 2021 that he would move forward the process for collective bargaining, however since that date he has not even convened one meeting on the subject. Our union members had to remind him of this when we spoke at City Council meeting in January around the Dr. King Holiday. We had requested meetings with him numerous times, but it took us three public rallies and widespread press coverage to finally get his attention.

We know that we do not have a majority six votes needed to win a collective bargaining resolution at this time. We need to be strategic about being involved in the upcoming City Council elections on November 8 to vote in at least 2 more candidates that support us!

## Need your help to Win Collective Bargaining - We're launching a Community-Labor-Faith Coalition!

We are inviting you to be part of a coalition effort to impact the upcoming November Municipal Elections, and to put the issue of Collective Bargaining front and center!

We know that with the new districts being drawn, and the current political climate, if we do things right we can secure a majority on council that will support us finally establishing an ordinance that establishes collective bargaining and a real voice for city workers!

*Please join us if you can, **next Tuesday, June 28 at 6pm for an introductory meeting.** We would also like to learn about your work and thoughts in this electoral period.*



# Virginia Beach City Worker Union Members Speak-Out at City Council Meetings!



## **After 9 years I still make less than \$15 per hour...**

"For 9 years I've worked in various neighborhoods throughout the Virginia beach areas, doing vital work, that is very hard work, out in the elements to repair the city's streets, yet even with my skills and experience, I still make under \$15 per hour. According to the union's Market Analysis, the mid-point for a Maintenance Workers is currently \$9,991 below Market average."

**Eric Ellerbe**, Maintenance Worker, Public Works, Street Maintenance



## **We're constantly working overtime to keep the city running...**

"I have been working for the city for over 32 years now, doing vital work, to keep the City's water running. You know we used to have 8 water crews going out to repair water main breaks, we are down to about 3 crews now. We are constantly working overtime and 50-60 hours per week to keep the water running because there are so many vacant positions. We can't hire any new workers on these low wages."

**Terry Green**, Crew Leader, Public Utilities, Water Distribution



## **We cannot afford to live in the city that we serve...**

"Many of us cannot afford to live in the city that we serve because we do not make enough. It is my hope that the council will show up and do their best for healthcare workers just like we do everyday for the people that we serve."

**Valeria Hodges**, LPN, Human Services, Indian River ICF



## **Are you helping the citizens, or hurting us...**

"Y'all are not going to get down from there and get in a garbage truck and do what I do. You are not gonna get in a back hoe and fix a sewer line. You are not gonna get on a lawn mower and cut the grass at a school. Are you helping the citizens, or are you hurting us?"

**Brad Belton**, Operator IV, Waste Management, Public Works



## **Been working 13 years and don't make mid-point...**

"I have been working for the city for over 13 years now, doing vital work, that is very hard work, out in the elements to repair the city's streets, yet even with my skills and experience, yet I still don't even make the mid-point of my salary grade."

**Devon Conley**, Motor Equipment Operator 3, Public Works, Highways

# Charlotte City Workers Struggle for LIVING WAGES & RESPECT!

## Union wins \$20/hour minimum wage, 10% raise, 2.5% shift differential & 2.5% for CDL



*Pictured above: Charlotte City Workers Union occupies street before March 28 City Council meeting*

“When city workers are under attack what do we do? Stand up fight back!” chanted city workers as they marched in the streets, and occupied a downtown intersection before the City Council Budget Hearing in Charlotte, NC on March 28.

The Charlotte City Workers Union chapter of UE Local 150 has been organizing a campaign to seriously raise the wages this year for city employees. An action on February 28 was attended by over a hundred city workers, including bus operators in SMART union, responding to the recent on-the-job shooting murder of Ethan Rivera, a young bus driver. UE150 members also called the name of Robert Taylor, a sanitation worker killed on the job by a motorist last year.

In back-to-back actions two months in a row, city workers and other community and labor allies packed the City Hall chambers demanding changes and raises during the deliberations for the FY2023 City budget. The union is demanding the city bring up wages by 10% to account for drastic inflation. Workers are also

requesting paid daily overtime, shift differential pay and a universal sick leave policy.

A single worker needs to earn at least \$62,122 per year to raise even a single child in the city, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Currently, 75% can't afford that. In the Solid Waste, the lowest paid department, 97% cannot afford it.

“City Council needs to pass a budget that enables city workers to support our families and afford to live inside this city,” stated **Dominic Harris**, President, Charlotte City Workers Union chapter of UE Local 150, Crew Leader in the Water Department.

After rallying on March 28 in Marshall Park and speaking to the news media, city workers, community allies and faith leaders marched in the streets to the Government Center, where they occupied a street intersection. Afterwards, they went inside to hear from eight city worker UE members that signed up to speak inside the city council meeting.

### Contact City Worker Leaders Across NC and VA

Dominic Harris, President, Charlotte chapter - 704-954-9647  
Ramone Johnson, President, Greensboro-516-902-4848  
Mike Robinson, Raleigh - 919-763-2473

Terry Green, Chair, Virginia Beach - 757-409-0845  
Keith Graham, Newport News - 757-263-8457  
Keshia Barnette, Durham - 919-949-7309

# Worker Leaders Are the Backbone of the Movement -- Join Training Near You!



*Pictured above: Charlotte City Workers Union steward training on April 14.*

## The key to a strong movement, is a strong leadership system.

Stewards are the front line eyes and ears of the union, and its backbone too! Stewards help listen to workers everyday concerns. Stewards study policy and state laws to know how to support co-workers in need. Stewards are constantly updating members about union activities. Stewards join workers to stand up to the boss when injustices are done.

For every supervisor, we need at least one strong steward. If management is meeting all the time to plan our work. If they are the only ones keeping documentation, then we are never going to be able to win fairness. We have to be just as organized as management to change workplace culture. We can do it! The union has the tools. We just need your involvement!

At the Solid Waste UE150 Union meeting on March 26 seven new stewards were elected, and Wilford Thomas was affirmed as department Chief Steward

We elected the following SWS stewards:

Wilford Thomas, SWS Chief Steward  
Kevin Carr, Yard Waste Steward  
Rory Pegram, CBD Steward  
Dedrick Davidson, Street Sweep Steward  
Cody Hart, Tech  
Shaequontia "DD" Gaddy, Automation Steward  
Antonique Forney, Bulky Steward  
Kenny Alford, Automation Steward

The Union is in the process of recruiting and training up new stewards in every department. **THIS MEANS YOU! if you are interested, please call Chief Steward: Craig Brown, 704-390-2365**

## Training for all North Carolina and Virginia City Workers!

**Saturday, July 9 10:00 am - 2:00pm**

Franklinton Center at Bricks, Whitakers, NC

*Sponsored by the UEREF Southern Worker Justice Campaign & UE Eastern Region*





*Pictured above: Charlotte City Workers Union rally at February 28 City Council meeting*

After rallying on March 28 in Marshall Park and speaking to the news media, city workers, community allies and faith leaders marched in the streets to the Government Center, where they occupied a street intersection. Afterwards, they went inside to hear from eight city worker UE members that signed up to speak inside the city council meeting.

“We work hard to take care of the city, all we ask is for the city to take care of us,” stated **Rory Pegram**, Solid Waste Services laborer and member of UE Local 150. Pegram continued, “People come in from out of town and they say this city looks great. I get compliments but I go home sad because I cannot afford to live in Charlotte. I am tired of just surviving, I want to live. I am struggling.” Pegram, who cannot afford rent, is currently living out of a hotel and paying week-to-week and has to work a second job to pay his bills, like many other full time city employees.

## It’s About More than Wages

The union’s fight is about more than just wages. City workers across many departments have reported harassment and unsafe working conditions. Particularly bad is the Solid Waste Services where many women have reported sexual harassment only to have it swept under the rug, or worse, management creating a climate where workers feel they can get away with unwarranted touching and verbal harassment.

“We are dealing with harassment in the workplace. We are being joked and acted upon,” stated **Shaequontia Gaddy**, UE150 union member and Senior Equipment Operator in Solid Waste Services. Gaddy continued, “We are spoken to inappropriately. We are not judged based on character. We are being sexually, verbally, mentally and emotionally abused. We are bullied and disrespected based on our gender, sex and identity change.”

At a recent union meeting, workers vowed to stand in solidarity with the women in Solid Waste Services to end the harassment.

Workers in Solid Waste have been joining the union in big numbers recently. Eight workers recently signed up to go through the UE steward training program to help strengthen the union.

City workers across North Carolina and Virginia are organizing as part of the Southern Workers Justice Campaign. On March 26, workers from across NC were invited to a statewide summit to share lessons, budget proposals and discuss how to better implement the UE Resolution against racism that calls on municipal workers to organize to reallocate funds from overfunded police departments. Municipal workers across both states have been rallying and speaking up at budget hearings to fight for raises and collective bargaining rights.



# Charlotte City Workers Union Members Speak-Out at City Council Meetings!



## **I am struggling...**

"We work hard to take care of the city, all we ask is for the city to take care of us. People come in from out of town and they say this city looks great. I get compliments but I go home sad because I cannot afford to live in Charlotte. I am tired of just surviving, I want to live. I am struggling."

**Rory Pegram**, Solid Waste Services, Yardwaste Laborer



## **I am proud...**

"As a city employee I am proud to be part of the progress for myself and my fellow union members. For the grace of God, today is a new day."

**Sonia Watts**, Special Transportation Services, Operator



## **Union jobs are better...**

"It is common knowledge that union paying jobs are better than non-union paying jobs. That will also go further in impressing a new employee. Part of orientation is where you learn about benefits, and I do not know a benefit better than being in a union. UE150 is not going anywhere!"

**Derrick Davis**, Water Department, Utility Tech 1



## **We are dealing with harassment...**

"We are dealing with harassment in the workplace. We are being joked and acted upon. We are spoken to inappropriately. We are not judged based on character. We are being sexually, verbally, mentally and emotionally abused. We are bullied and disrespected based on our gender, sex and identity change."

**Shaequontia Gaddy**, Senior Equipment Operator, Solid Waste Services



## **We need respect, we need higher pay...**

"75% of the workers cannot afford to live in the city that they work in and raise our children in. Solid Waste don't sleep. 24 hours a day we are running. We need our respect, we need those wages, we need higher pay to support our families. We lost a co-worker in the line of duty that we do, it is dangerous out there. Snow, rain, 30 degrees, 100 degrees we are out there cleaning the city."

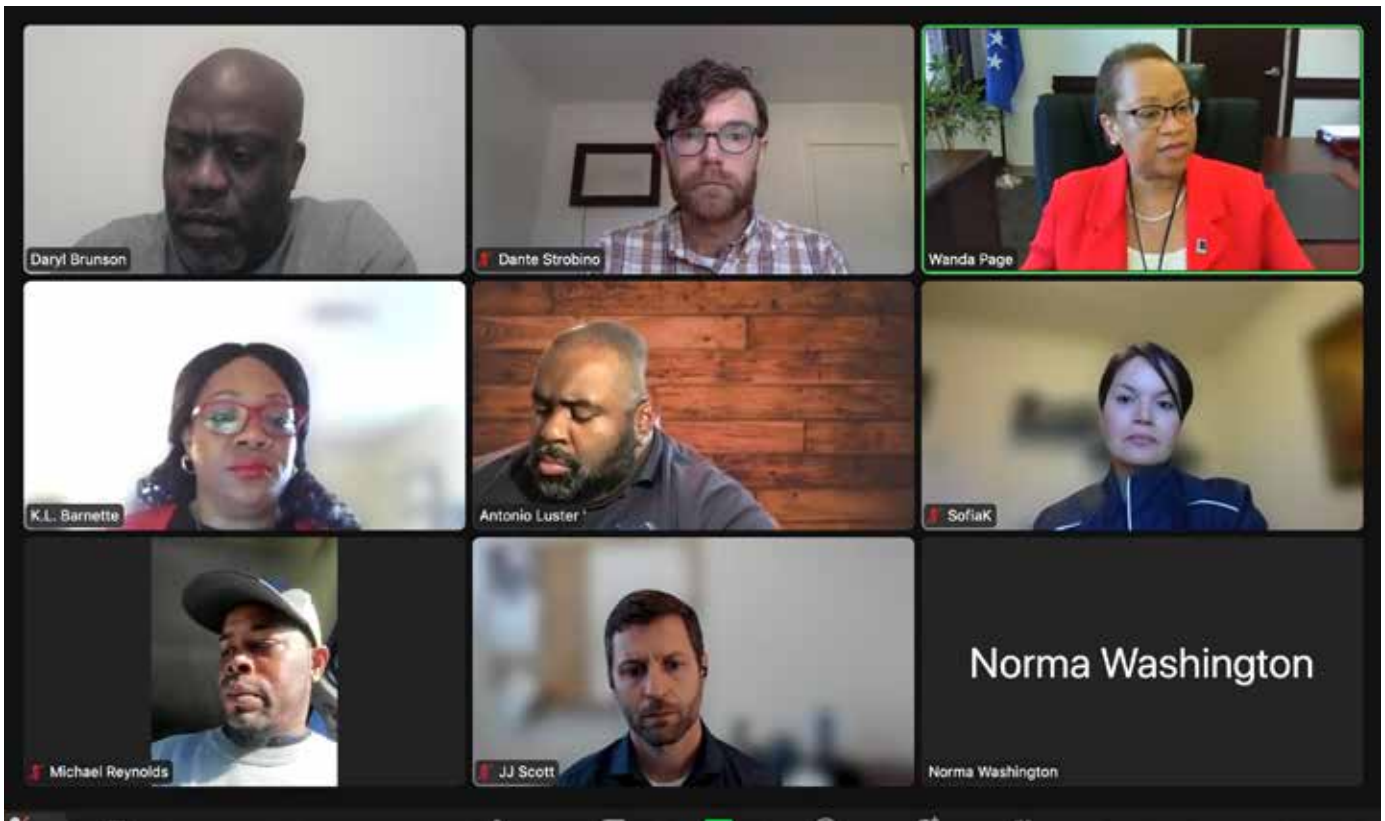
**Antoquie "Jeremy" Forney**, Solid Waste Services



## **We perserved & endured a pandemic...**

"We perserved and endured a pandemic. I had it twice. But when I had to come to work, and was able, I was there. These worker are worth their weight in gold and are worth everything you can give them."

**Craig Brown**, Crew Leader, Water Department, UE150 Chief Steward



## Durham City Workers Establish Quarterly Meet-n-Confer with City Manager, Push During Budget Hearing

After building support from the newly-established Durham Workers Commission, the Durham City Workers Union was able to establish quarterly meetings with the City Manager, Human Resources and other executive staff to discuss policy and budgetary matters.

The Durham City Workers Union has been campaigning, since before the pandemic, for the city to revise its outdated Grievance process, to allow co-worker representation and provide more job security. The City Manager has now finally taken up some of the workers suggestions and in August 2022 will be issuing a new proposed policy, including many of the union's proposed changes, for more feedback from all city workers. This is a huge step forward!

Additionally, city workers developed their own budget proposals and presented them in meetings with the City Manager, and separately with Mayor Elaine O'Neal and other city council members.

City workers also attended the City budget hearing on June 6 and spoke out about their needs. City workers **Keshia Barnette, Michael Reynolds, Donald**

**Quick and William Speed** spoke eloquently to council.

Reynolds stated, "Right now the City Manager is supporting the Union's proposal for a 4% Step Pay increase, We thank you for that. However, the Market adjustment is only 3%, when it needs to be at least 8%. With inflation being over 8%, anything less than that is a pay cut for us, and will only add more stress to our lives."

### Opposing more Police funding

Donald Quick stated, "our union is proud to be here tonight with Durham Beyond Policing friends to oppose the City spend almost \$200 Thousand on the SpotShooter program this year. We know that there is a gun problem in our society and in our city. However, in the other cities where they tried SpotShooter it hasn't worked, and only wasted money and lead to more Black and Brown people, like us city workers, getting arrested. That money could be better used to invest in city workers and our community needs like more mental health responders to 911 calls, rather than armed police."





## Greensboro City Workers Host First Meet-n-Confer with City Manager, Win First Ever Step Pay Plan with Years of Service!

Greensboro city workers hosted a series of rallies, starting after MLK holiday to raise awareness about the need for the Step Pay Plan (which they won last year to get rid of the racist and unfair merit-only pay system) to include payment for Years of Service.

After rallying in front of City Council in January and again in March, and also speaking at the City Council budget hearing, workers finally got the attention of the new City Manager, Taiwo Jaiyeoba. After this rally, Jaiyeoba invited the leadership of the

Greensboro City Workers Union, UE Local 150, into a meeting to hear their proposals for the City budget (pictured above on April 11, 2022).

City workers again attended and spoke at a budget hearing in May of 2022, again pressing their concerns that senior, skilled workers were not compensated for their years of service. Ultimately, the city council voted to include in their budget, for the first time ever, money to raise up workers wages based on their years of service and on a fair bases, with the step pay plan.



# Raleigh city workers Speak-out at Budget Hearing, demand \$22/hr min wage, challenge Police funding

Report by Jared Everson, Parks & Recreation

On Tuesday, June 7th, 2022, Raleigh City Council held a public hearing, at the Raleigh Municipal Building, to hear Raleigh residents' thoughts on the proposed budget for the new fiscal year. The hearing was attended by over 60 workers, their supporters and community activists representing a diverse range of organizations. Some community organizations represented were Refund Raleigh, Black Workers for Justice, the Democratic Socialists of America, Muslims for Social Justice, Raleigh City Workers Union UE Local 150, National Conference of Black Lawyers, and Raleigh Area Workers Assembly. This was a successful worker and community mobilization by the Refund Raleigh organization's campaign.

## “Overworked and underpaid”

**Michael Robinson**, UE150 member in Solid Waste Services spoke to the city council meeting stating,

*“Solid waste services is one of the most important safety services in this city. If we do not do our job there will be dozens of more pandemics and health crisis’. But yet are underpaid and overworked. I work in yardwaste and we started out with 20 trucks and 4 routes. Now we have 10 trucks and 8 routes. I have been hospitalized for 7 days due to heat exhaustion. Workers are being hospitalized for heat exhaustion but management is not investing in hydration supplies. When we bring up our concerns about resrouces to do our jobs safely, we are told there is no money. Yet police are getting a 12% increase and we are only getting a 2% increase. I have been working since 2014 and still make less than a rookie police officer. We are here alongside Refund Raleigh demanding \$22 minimum wage, enforcement of the heat policy by management, more hydration supplies. The City of Raleigh”*



The demands were clear:

- ▶ **a \$22 minimum wage** for City of Raleigh workers,
- ▶ **a new crisis response program modeled after the Denver STAR program**, which has been praised for its use of de-escalation methods to resolve crises without the arrests and violence that typically accompany law enforcement responses.

## 12 % raise for Police but only 2% for others?

In particular, activists called out the city council for its hypocrisy. The proposed budget is expected to give the Raleigh Police Department an annual budget of \$124 million, an \$8 million increase from last year, and including a 12% raise for police officers. Other city workers are getting only a 2% raise, with the “lack of funding” being cited as the reason for these low and rather marginal raises being given to sanitation workers, parks & rec workers, and other city employees. It should also be noted that the massive proposed police budget is being issued alongside no evidence whatsoever that it can or will reduce crime.

RPD has been an extremely heavily funded police force for many years, getting a larger annual budget than some entire countries spend on their militaries, yet there is clear lack of evidence that this has reduced crime in the city. Not to mention that two city residents have been killed by Raleigh police just this year, showing that the use of militarized force as a response to crime is both brutal and unnecessary. Residents who attended the public hearing expressed their disapproval towards these obviously skewed priorities, especially given the current city housing and cost of living crisis that is causing many city workers to relocate outside of Raleigh.