

# Southern Worker Justice

Newsletter of the Southern Worker Justice Campaign

southernworkerjustice.org

## Municipal Summit converges city workers from North Carolina & Virginia largest cities



On March 25, dozens of city workers from the largest cities in North Carolina and Virginia attended a Municipal Workers Summit at the historic Beloved Community Center in Greensboro, NC. At the summit, workers shared key lessons in their efforts to organize their co-workers, win changes in local economic and safety policies, as well as efforts to engage in the City Budgeting process.

“Every year each of our cities passes a budget that sets our wages and benefits. Greensboro is always looking at what Charlotte and Raleigh are doing. What our city worker brother and sisters win in those cities has a direct impact on us. When we organize power across the state it helps to shape the entire market for our industry,” stated **Bryce Carter**, City of Greensboro Streets department, and key worker leader of the Southern Worker Justice Campaign

Workers from the cities of Charlotte, Greensboro, Durham, Raleigh and Virginia Beach gathered to

also discuss efforts at the local and statewide level to pass House Bill 470, which would significantly expand job security protections for city workers by virtue of a Civil Service Board.

Sister **Nathanette Mayo**, retired Durham Water Department worker, lead a series of two trainings on “Building Unity in Right to Work” and “Organizing 1-on-1 Conversations”. Workers were able to share their practical experiences of talking to their co-workers on their jobs and identify key take aways to bring back to work.

*(continued inside on page 2)*

### INSIDE:

★ **Charlotte City Workers Set the Standard, Win \$22/hr**

★ **Virginia Beach City workers**

# Municipal Summit *(continued from page 1)* Charlotte City Workers Win Big



*Pictured above: Nathanette Mayo leads training at Municipal Summit on March 25, 2023*

Charlotte sanitation worker Kevin Carr lead a role play with co-worker Deddric Davidson.

The end of the summit was a presentation titled "Prioritizing City Workers and Black Community Over Police". The presentation featured research about the growth of police budgets and wages in comparison to other departments in recent years. "The problem is not police training, police diversity or police methods. The problem is the dramatic and unprecedented expansion and intensity of policing over the last forty years, a fundamental shift in the role of police in society," Alex Vitale, Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College.

For example, it was shown how for every dollar spent in the Charlotte city budget, that \$0.59 cents is spent on public safety. For Greensboro that number is \$0.26 cents. Likewise Police and Fire tend to have completely different pay scales, often getting a Step Pay Plan, plus merit plus the annual cost-of-living adjustments, where as most of the other trade and maintenance positions only get a merit raise, dependent on the evaluations and prejudices of their supervisor. Likewise, Police and Fire often have more job security, for instance in several cities across the state, including Charlotte, only Police and Fire are covered with a Civil Service Board.



Charlotte city workers fill up the City Council meeting chambers and speak before council on May 8.



Charlotte city workers march from local park to city council meeting on May 8, 2023

After a spring full of campaign activities - meeting with workers after work, meeting with city council members and the City manager twice, speaking out at City Council public meetings multiple times and more, Charlotte City workers won big including:

**\$22/hr**  
Minimum wage

**11%**  
raise for those who earn under \$45,000

**8%**  
raise for those earning under \$50,000

**7.2%**  
raise for those earning under \$60,000

**3%**  
raise for those who earn over \$60,000

# Charlotte City Workers Set the Standard! Win \$22 per hour and 11% raises!



*Charlotte city workers inside City Hall lobby after speaking at Council meeting on May 8.*

On Monday, May 8, Southern Worker Justice Campaign Charlotte city worker members rallied and marched in the streets from Marshall Park to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center in Uptown Charlotte chanting “When city workers are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!”

City workers from departments around the city went to Charlotte City Council meeting — against the advice of department heads and supervisors — to demand higher raises than the six percent raise being proposed in the city budget (three percent in July and a second three percent increase in January of 2024).

Solid waste services worker and SWJC member **Rory Pegram** told the council, “I can’t stand that I go home on Fridays when everybody is excited and I am miserable because I got to figure out what to do to make it to Monday.”

“It makes me feel kinda like I’m being slapped in the face,” Charlotte sanitation worker **Kevin Carr** told WCNC Charlotte.

Charlotte is a growing city, and that growth depends on the clean sidewalks, pothole-free streets, clean water, and reliable rail services provided by city workers. The Charlotte City Workers Union is demanding that these essential workers deserve to be paid a living wage.

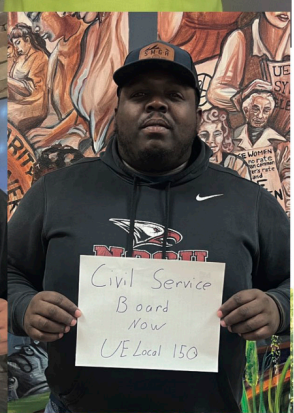
After union members spoke at the May 8 budget hearing, City Council members decided to make some adjustments to the budget. Quoting comments made by Local 150 members, they came up with a new budget recommendation based on the needs of city workers.

The new recommended budget increases the minimum wage for a 40-hour work week from \$20 to \$22 per hour, and significantly increases raises for workers making under \$60,000 per year. They will see increases between 7.2 and 11 percent, depending on their current rate, with the largest increases going to the lowest-paid workers.

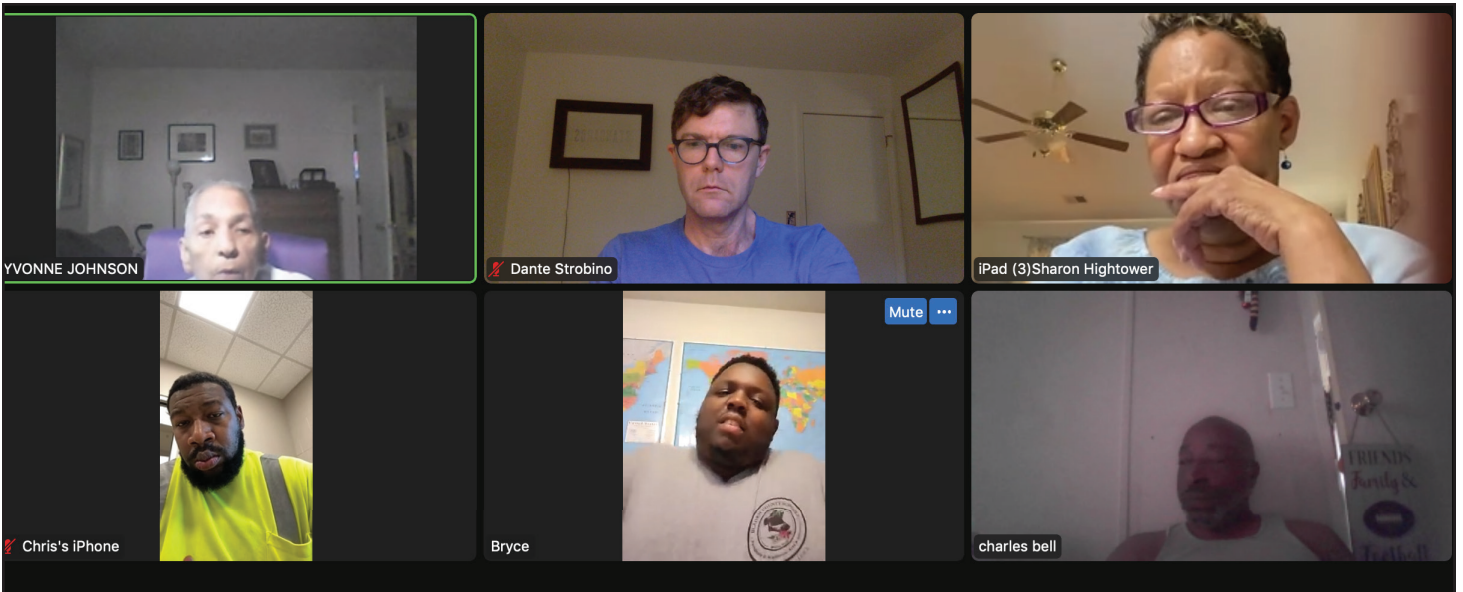
The council will make adjustments and take an unofficial vote on this later this month, before deciding whether to adopt the budget in June.



# Support Civil Service Board for Racial and Economic Justice for City Workers!



# Greensboro City Workers Win Passage of House Bill to Provide More Job Security



*Pictured above: Greensboro city workers meet with city council member Yvonne Johnson and Sharon Hightower via zoom on April 20, 2023 to gain support for their budget proposals and the Civil Service Board.*

City workers in Greensboro have been fighting for more job security for nearly 50 years.

“City workers have been facing racism, discrimination and unjust terminations since at least the 1970’s, going back to when a group of Black sanitation workers were fired for organizing to win improvements. We have stood with them ever since and it is time for this policy to change with the passing of a Civil Service Board,” said **Rev. Nelson Johnson** of Faith Community Church.

City workers rallied at city council and spoke before the body on both April 4 and May 2.

City workers in Greensboro, Winston Salem, and Durham are currently at-will employees that can be fired at the whim of their managers. After meeting with City Council members, building support from Mayor Nancy Vaughan and several state Legislators, and even testifying before the Local Government Committee of the NC House of Representatives, House Bill 470 bill which would create a Civil Service Board, passed the NC House April 26. Now it moves to the Senate.

Too many qualified, skilled workers have been terminated or otherwise pushed out of the workforce the last few years. Discipline isn’t consistent, applied equally across departments or shifts, and has been based more on opinion than policy.

The City of Greensboro has the worst grievance procedure in the state. A prominent employment and civil rights attorney in North Carolina has used the City of Greensboro grievance procedure as case study in “worst practices.” If a worker is terminated their only redress is to write a letter to the City Manager. In workers’ experience, going back the last several years, we have not had any cases overturned in the favor of the worker. This has disproportionately negatively impacted Black workers.

The Civil Service Board would afford workers that are unjustly terminated, suspended, or demoted the opportunity to appeal these decisions once finalized by the City Manager. Workers could subpoena management and co-workers to testify before this board. This would provide an important checks and balances on the power of a single executive. If the City Manager makes a just decision that was consistent with city policy, then it would be upheld by the Civil Service Board.

Workers who are terminated and appeal to the board would not be immediately reinstated and back on the job, as misstated by many city council members. They would be reinstated only after a successful appeal before the Civil Service Board has been concluded.

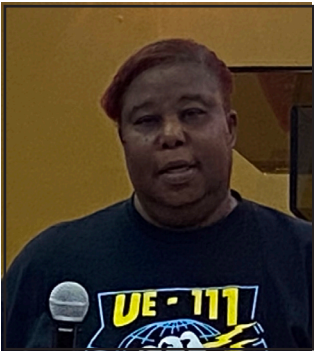
# Virginia Beach City Workers Speak out at Collective Bargaining Forum

*Below are quotes from speeches at at forum on May 20, 2023 at Kingdom Reign Church*



“ Most city workers have to work two jobs to make ends meet and to be able to live in this city. I bought a house in this city 5 years ago, it took me 15 years to be able to do that. It shouldn't be that way.”

- **Brad Belton**, Waste Management Operator IV



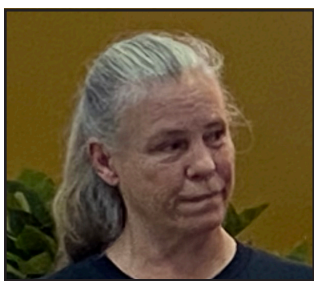
“ The wages are too low. We have to work a second job. I take overtime any time I can get it. Collective bargaining is definitely what we need. It is better wages. Better benefits. Currently we have to get secondary insurance to pay for medicine. I don't think that is right.”

- **Trina Love**, Human Services, Behavioral Health Assistant,



“ I, too, myself have to work two jobs to pay for my apartment. In landscaping they do not pay enough. It's a hard pill to swallow. That is why we need this union.”

- **Benny Noble**, Parks & Recreation, Groundskeeper



“ I know that Human Services department has a lot of workers working overtime just to be able to pay bills, some are working 7 days straight for most of the month. With collective bargaining, city workers could have a better work-life balance so that they could enjoy their lives and their families,”

- **Patricia Thebert**, nurse, Human Services department



“ Ebenezer Church supports your efforts. Virginia Beach Interdenominational Ministers' Conference Supports you. Georgia Allen, President of the NAACP said at one of our meetings with the City Manager that, 'divided you beg, but united you bargain.'”

- **Rev. Perez Gatling**, Ebenezer Baptist Church, President VB IMC

# Virginia Beach city workers host educational forum about collective bargaining



Virginia Beach city workers along with community and faith supporters gather at Kingdom Reign Church on May 20, 2023.

Every day tens of thousands of blue-collar public sector workers help our Virginia communities have clean drinking water, dispose of our trash, keep sewage and stormwater from overflowing, keep our parks and beaches beautiful, care for those who need medical care, and more. Now these city workers are asking for a voice in their democracy on the job every day via collective bargaining.

But what is collective bargaining? How would it change the power relations in our city for the betterment of city workers and our communities?

City workers, educators, community and faith supporters gathered at Kingdom Reign Baptist church, with the support of Bishop Theron Williams, on May 20, 2023 for an educational forum to discuss these questions and more. The crowd heard directly from frontline city workers about why they are demanding collective bargaining.

The Virginia Beach City Council will begin discussions in June on an ordinance to allow collective bargaining. The forum was to help ensure everyone in the community understands why it is important to support.

Much of the information shared as part of the educational presentation was sourced from reports issues recently by the Economic Policy Institute, *Unions can reduce Public Sector Pay Gap, June 2021* (see charts below)) and The Commonwealth Institute.

## Black and Hispanic workers especially benefit from public-sector collective bargaining

Differences between local government and private-sector earnings

Race/ethnicity	Collective bargaining		
	Banned	Permitted	Required
White	-26.5%	-19.6%	-15.3%
Black	-10.7%	-2.3%	6.6%
Hispanic	-12.3%	-2.1%	9.4%
AAPI/other	-29.0%	-15.4%	-9.8%

## Pay gap for public-sector workers is larger in states with weak or no collective bargaining rights

Differences between local government and private-sector earnings

Education	Geography			Collective bargaining		
	U.S.	Virginia	No. VA	Banned	Permitted	Required
All	-14.1%	-29.9%	-33.4%	-22.9%	-16.6%	-10.5%
All (with add'l demographic controls)	-12.2%	-26.1%	-28.8%	-19.8%	-15.2%	-8.8%
No bachelor's	-0.6%	-14.2%	-11.0%	-13.6%	-7.9%	6.8%
Bachelor's	-23.0%	-37.0%	-39.3%	-30.1%	-23.7%	-20.6%

# Charlotte City workers speak out at City Council meeting about proposed FY2024 City Budget



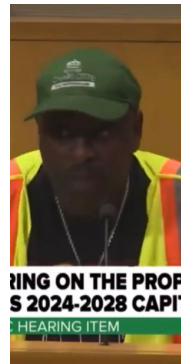
**Dominic Harris** with Charlotte Water stated that, “The cost of living in Charlotte is between \$25-26 per hour which means there are still city workers that fall behind, that can’t provide everything they need to live in this city. We need to make sure every city worker can make it.”



**Derrick Davis** with Charlotte Water said “It’s a slap in the face” to see police officers getting 8-10% pay raises while utility workers like himself are getting 6% in the proposed budget, especially when the city is proposing funding the raises for CMPD officers through higher water rates.



**Kevin Carr** with Solid Waste Services said, “A lot of us are not making the same salary as our competitors” in the private sector. He would like to see a 15% pay raise rather than the proposed 6% so that Second Harvest Food Bank no longer has to feed folks in his department.



**Roy Pegram** with Solid Waste Services said he was highlighted in the Charlotte Observer last year as a city worker who has to live in a hotel. He still lives in a hotel today, where rent has gone up as well as other costs of living and every week he has to sacrifice something to make ends meet. “I am cleaning homeless tents, under bridges, doing hazardous work, doing 2-3 jobs a day. Then at the end of the week when I get paid I almost start crying because I can’t make it. I am miserable. I need to do what to do to pay for food, car note, rent. I want you to take care of us.”

## City workers lead trainings to educate workers across North Carolina



**Craig Brown** (pictured center left with blue hoodie), a Water maintenance worker for the City of Charlotte helped develop a series of 3 training modules for city workers to better understand their rights at work. Over the week of March 14-18, three courses were hosted, one each every other day. The first two were conducted on zoom and attracted over twenty five workers from across the state. The third and final session was held on Saturday March 28 and attracted about a dozen workers to Charlotte.