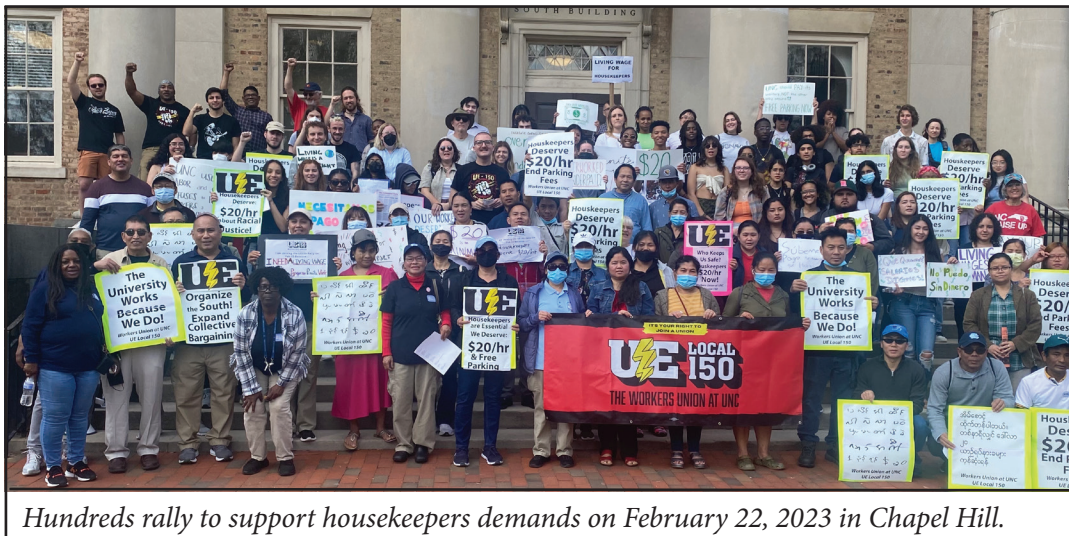


“Overworked and Underpaid”, UNC Housekeepers rally (again) for \$20/hr!



Hundreds rally to support housekeepers demands on February 22, 2023 in Chapel Hill.

“We are rallying for higher pay because UNC has increased our workload due to understaffing,” stated **Robin Lee**, a housekeeper and UE Local 150 member at UNC Chapel Hill. Robin continued, “We should get paid for the hard work we do, often above our job descriptions, to keep the university clean.”

On Wednesday, February 22 over one hundred housekeepers and their supporters from UNC rallied to deliver their demands to the Board of Governors that the UNC System raise the minimum wage to \$20 per hour, end its pay-to-park requirement for workers, and officially recommend that the state legislature repeal its ban on public sector collective bargaining, as outlined in the union’s open letter published on the same day.

“The cost of gas, food, rent and everything is going up. Housekeepers deserve \$20 per hour. We clean restrooms, offices, classrooms and everything. We are very good workers and work hard for the university. We are asking that they help us provide for our

families. This is why we are here for the rally,” stated **Saw Moo**, housekeeper and UE Local 150 member.

The Board of Governors hosted their meeting in a swanky hotel, the Dillon, in downtown Raleigh. Workers held another rally that same afternoon as their meeting was ending. Workers rode the elevator up to the 9th floor of the Dillon to confront the decision makers. Later, as they were leaving the meeting, they were forced to either walk or drive through a strong picket line outside the hotel. Housekeepers, graduate workers and students from nearby NC State University also joined this action.

(continued inside on page 2)

INSIDE:

- ★ **DHHS Workers Say “They Punish Our Loyalty” at Town Hall**
- ★ **Retention Bonus is Bribe**

UNC Housekeeper rally (continued from page 1)



Pictured above: Housekeepers from UNC and NCSU rally at Dillon Hotel in Raleigh, Feb 22.

Housekeepers have been engaged in an aggressive campaign the last 6 months to raise their wages. What started as two housekeepers, union members Robin Lee and Chineka Stanley, speaking out to the campus newspaper, the Daily Tar Heel, during Housekeeper Appreciation Day, has turned into a mass movement.

Robin and Chineka collected written statements from 21 housekeepers in their zone. The union published these statements on social media, allowing the world to see directly the frustration of workers due to understaffing, being overworked and underpaid.

From there a petition was launched which garnered over 2,200 signatures from housekeepers, graduate workers, other campus workers and students, including others across the state's 17 UNC System universities. This petition was delivered in a mass rally with over 150 people to the Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz last October.

After this action and the continued media attention, housekeepers then brought their demands to the Board of Trustees. After their pressure and press event, they were invited inside. Robin Lee was allowed to make a stirring plea to the body. This resulted in her and two other housekeepers meeting with Vice Chancellor of Finance Nate Knuffman. It was told to the workers that they could not raise their wages because ever since the union won their wage increases to \$15 per hour a few years ago, they were above the official pay scale. They claimed to be blocked by the Office of State Human Resources from further increases.

However, on December 14, Knuffman issued a memo stating that he got permission from OSHR to increase their salary ranges up to \$21.40 per hour, and gave almost all housekeepers at \$0.90 raise up to \$16.71 per hour. This served to both further upset the workers, but also provided validation that our organizing could win pay increases. Even better, now UNC does not need OSHR approval to pay \$20 because of the new pay scales. University workers at the state's other 16 universities, however, did not get this same raise.

Frustrated with this explanation, housekeepers continued to meet and organize. In early January the union submitted a letter to UNC Classification and Compensation Director Adam Beck, demanding answers to how the pay scale could be justified. Apparently everyone with more than a few months experience was moved up in the pay scale to the "Journey Market" rate. When reading the state's Career Banding policy which explains the various pay levels within the pay scale, it only allows for wage

(continued half way down page 3)



“You Punish Our Loyalty”, UE150 President Confronts DHHS & Lawmakers During Town Hall

Fully acknowledging the mental health crisis in our state and the severe understaffing in state facilities, the State Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has been hosting a series of Town Hall forums to hear from the community. UE150 members have been attending these events all across the state to raise up our demands for safe staffing.

On February 9, at the DHHS Town Hall in Greenville, UE150 President **Sekia Royall**, along with Cherry Hospital member **Martha Brown**, spoke out about the concerns of DHHS workers.

On the stage was Kody H. Kinsley, Secretary, NC-DHHS, John Bell, NC House Majority Leader, NC State Representative, R-District 10, Jim Burgin, NC State Senator, R-District 12, Kandie Smith, NC State Senator, D-District 5, Gloristine Brown, NC State Representative, D-District 8, and Timothy Reeder, NC State Representative, R-District 9, all from nearby districts.

Sekia stated, “State Operated DHHS mental health facilities are in a dire understaffing crisis. Some



Sekia Royall speaks at DHHS Town Hall in Greenville on February 9, 2023.

facilities are closing entire units, we are caring for hundreds less patients than our capacity. Front line healthcare positions are vacant in huge rates 30-50%. Contract staff are being paid three times more than state employees. Many feel you are punishing our loyalty. We need urgent significant pay increases and changes in management.”

UNC Housekeepers *(continued from page 2)* increases based on “knowledge, skills and abilities”, not years of service. However, when deciding to move all workers up to Journey Market rate, there was no tests for knowledge, skills and abilities. Crew Leaders were moved up to “Advanced Market” rate also without explanation according to policy. This resulted in Supervisors receiving over \$4,000 and Managers receiving a raise over \$8,000.

In response to this letter, the university began sending management around to all the zones where there was union activity to explain to workers how it worked. However, when the Assistant Director showed up and union workers began asking questions, it was clear that he, too, did not understand!

The union secured a commitment to a written explanation within 10 days, which was provided the week before our rally. The explanation only further angered workers.

Then, the day before the February 22 rally, the UNC System issued a memo about a “retention bonus” they were offering workers to stay for another year. Again, this only upset workers further (see attached statement on this bonus). Workers that decide to leave

before the twelve months are over will have to pay back the bonus. Many workers are characterizing this as a back handed bribe that feels like another slap in the face.

The State of North Carolina underpays and overworks those who uphold the state’s system of public higher education, especially the campus workers who maintain universities’ appearance. Workers are forced to do more and more work without increases in pay commensurate to the rising cost of living across the state. The UNC System’s reputation of providing a world-class education and conducting cutting-edge research would not be possible without the work of housekeepers, graduate workers, research technicians, librarians and all university workers. Over the last 3 years, workers have seen how vital their work is to the UNC System, and despite a rainy day fund totaling \$5 billion and a surplus in state revenue last year of \$6 billion, their work is still not valued enough to pay a living wage.

Workers vowed to continue their campaign until they win, including taking demands to the State Legislature, which is now debating it’s 2023-24 budget.

Political Action Update!

Since the State Legislature convened into session in January, UE150 rank-n-file members have been busy meeting with State elected officials.

Members of the UE150 DHHS Council, which is composed of state mental health workers in the Department of Health and Human Services, have continued to reach out to members of the Health and Human Services Joint Legislative Oversight Committee to push our safe staffing recommendations, including:

1. **10% Retention bonuses made permanent** and granted to all front line positions.
2. **Return to pre-pandemic minimum staffing ratios** and staffing for acuity to meet the needs of the patients on the units. Unit minimums to be published openly.
3. **Shift differential pay** for all staff including food service and housekeeping.
4. **Facility directors should establish regular meet-n-confer sessions** with UE150 leadership at each facility, and sincerely respond to suggested changes.
5. **Establishment of a Safe Staffing Task Force** to investigate the root causes of employee turn-over and expedite filling staff vacancies.
6. **In-range salary adjustments and establish a 7-year step plan**, similar to what was done for prison guards in last year's budget.

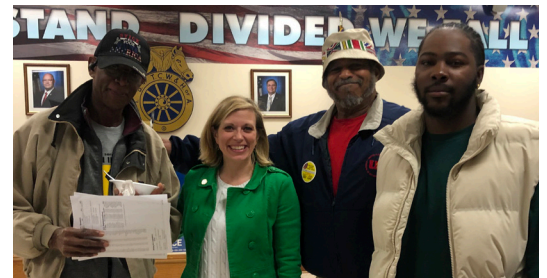
On February 25th, UE150 members attended a Legislative breakfast organized by the NC State AFL-CIO in Raleigh. UE150 members had attended a similar breakfast in Charlotte the week before. **Charlie Daniels** (NC DOT), **Angaza Laughinghouse** (Capital Area), **Jonathan Fortune** (Raleigh City), **Rakesh Patel** (Central Regional Hospital), **Willis Johnson** (retired activist NC DOT) and new NCSU chapt. member Benjamin Pulgar-Guzman all participated in the Raleigh Legislative breakfast. Brother Angaza Laughinghouse spoke to the 120 unionists and challenged all 14 legislators present to support the repeal of NC General Statute section 95-98, the public sector workers ban on the fundamental human right to collectively bargain, raise university housekeepers minimum wage of \$20 per hour, increase DHHS Hospital staffing, grant Cost of Living increase of 10% for all state workers, and increase the taxes on "big corporations and wealthy class" to pay a fair share.

On January 23, UE150 DHHS Council leaders **Rakesh Patel** (CRH), **Dave Bartholemew** (Broughton Hospital) and **Martha Brown** (Cherry Hospital) met with **Senator Natalie Murdock**, who sits on the HHS Oversight committee to discuss safe staffing recommendations. Sen. Murdock agreed to attempt to visit CRH to see the conditions herself. Members also met with **Senator Mike Woodard** on February 9 stressing the same concerns about understaffing. Also in February, DHHS members Rakesh Patel and **Buba Subally** met with **Rep. Mark Pless and Senator Mary Wills Bode**.

Members also met with **Rep. Amos Quick** (Guilford County) and **Rep. Vernetta Alston** (Durham) to discuss the prospects of amending the City of Greensboro and Durham's Charter to allow for Civil Service Board job protections.



Rakesh Patel, Dave Bartholemew and Martha Brown and UE IR Dante Strobino meet with Senator Natalie Murdock on January 23.



Charlie Daniels, Angaza Laughinghouse and Jonathan Fortune meet with State Representative (Wake County) Sara Crawford

Retention Bonus is a Bribe - UE150 Statement

“They don’t care about us,” stated **Thomas Wilson**, developmental technician at a state mental health facility, Murdoch Center, in Butner, NC.

The last week of January the state announced a retention bonus for state employees in the UNC System and Department of Health and Human Services. This has only served to anger more workers. The state easily has the money to offer us a bonus with no strings attached (nevermind a real significant raise that we need). After working understaffed, in dangerous and exhausting conditions for over two years, the state could give us a clean ‘thank you’ bonus, but instead they want to use this money as a bribe to force us to stay on the job.

We call on the state to remove all the conditions and strings attached to this money.

We should not have to pay it back. A real ‘thank you’ does not have strings attached.

This further risks our health and safety. What about those of us that are at risk of being injured? What about those of us being bullied by management? Now we must stay to endure more.

As the state talks about mental health in our communities, they clearly don’t care about the mental health of state employees. We learned the sad lesson during the COVID-19 pandemic that the bosses literally do not care if we die, as long as we come to work.

This retention bonus takes advantage of poor and struggling workers.

They know we are living paycheck-to-paycheck, especially with the skyrocketing cost of food, rent and all our bills. They know we are going to spend this money as soon as we get it, leaving us in greater fear of losing our jobs. This is a brute measure of power and control over our labor.

If, for some reason, we have to leave our jobs, then they could potentially take away our entire last paycheck to pay them back. This is heartless. This certainly does not fulfill DHHS core mission to have “joy” at work.



Robin Lee (above) housekeeper at UNC:

“They can’t give us \$20 per hour but they can afford a bonus. This paper tells us if we get fired, we gotta pay the money back. If we transfer to another facility, we gotta pay the money back. If we get wrote up, we don’t get it. This is like back in the slavery days. ‘Yes, massa’. Why should we have to stay on the job to give us the \$1500? Put in our paycheck. We don’t need a one time bonus. We already earned this money because of the extra work we are already doing.”

We deserve a significant pay increase, to a minimum of \$20 per hour. We deserve a 7-Year Step Plan, like the prison guards received in last year’s budget.

Unfortunately, this meager bonus will do little to actually retain staff. Employees who plan to retire are saying they still plan to do so anyway. Employees who are looking for work elsewhere are planning to continue to look for other work.

Workers must continue to organize and build our union to challenge the State Legislature and our department heads to do the right thing. We are demanding that they visit our work sites and hear directly from the workers. We are demanding they invest in our Safe Staffing recommendations. We are demanding significant wage increases, now!

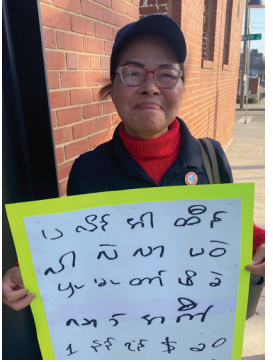
UNC Housekeepers Speak out!

Below are quotes from speeches at the February 22 rally in Chapel Hill



"We are rallying for higher pay because UNC has increased our workload due to understaffing. We should get paid for the hard work we do, often above our job descriptions, to keep the university clean. We are the ones cleaning these extra buildings because we don't have enough staff."

-Robin Lee, housekeeper, UNC



"Why are we hear today? We deserve a raise. are sick and tired. We are union members. First time I did not know how to be a union member, but now I see the very good support for us. We are brothers and sisters for the union. Our housekeeper members need to be members of the union."

- Htoo Paw, housekeeper, UNC



"We have rallied now four or five times. The reason is to increase our salary to \$20 per hour. The other reason for our protest is because there are three kinds of workers, some worker are during day, some in evening and some at night. We need to have pay for parking, even at night. We need free parking."

- Aung Than, housekeeper, UNC



"I am not going to talk for my own profit, I am going to stand up and represent for all our housekeepers at UNC here. We are here today because we as housekeepers deserve \$20 per hour. Everything is changing. Prices change. Gas prices, rent, food, utility bills everything is up, but our salary is not up. It is unfair pay."

- Saw Moo, housekeeper, UNC



"We really appreciate UE150. They have been with us for every struggle. And because of UE150, there are things UNC is starting to do because the union pushed for it. Anna Wu and Donna from Ombuds are gonna be doing interviews with housekeepers now because of the attention UE150 put on the abusive behavior put on housekeepers on all shifts. Now the top of the top want to know what is going on."

- Tracy Harter, housekeeper, UNC



"Who keeps us safe? Housekeepers! So, why aren't we acting like it? \$20 is not even enough and they can't even pay housekeepers that. It is very important as us as Black people to rally behind all people of color here. It is really easy for non people of color to sit in an office and dictate what people of color deserve. The \$0.90 was a pacification technique used to try and keep us quiet."

- T, Black Student Movement

As Understaffing Crisis Across DHHS Continues to Worsen, Workers Organize for “Safe Staffing”

The chronic understaffing at state mental health facilities continues to get worse. Last week the legislature’s nonpartisan fiscal research division told lawmakers that right now, close to 3,700 positions are vacant — slightly more than triple the 1,230 vacancies reported in 2020. The union has been reporting for months that some units have entirely closed, while others remain 50-60% understaffed, causing tremendous stress on workers, and leading to increases injuries and burn out.

“We’ve seen a decrease in the number of people served, looking at last year compared to two years ago,” said Luke McDonald, from the legislature’s fiscal research division. “Across all the facilities [that] adds up to over 2,400 fewer people served, so a 31 percent decrease.”

For example, the state’s three psychiatric hospitals have a capacity of 894 beds, but they were only able to serve, on average, a total of 667 patients. The state’s three Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Centers, if fully staffed, would have enough space for 146 patients every day, but they were only able to serve 80 patients per day, on average, throughout 2022.

Meanwhile, the UE150 campaign for Safe Staffing continues to push forward for accountability. On March 2, **Patrice Jacobs**, UE150 Longleaf Chapter President and DHHS Council Co-Chair spoke out at a Town Hall Forum organized by DHHS in New Bern. Present on the panel was **Senator Jim Burgin**, **DHHS Secretary Kody Kinsley** and **DHHS Deputy Secretary Mark Benton**.

“We are still suffering with COVID in our facilities. At Longleaf it is really bad. We had a whole unit down sick for almost three weeks ” said Patrice to the panel. “Our safety is being threatened by understaffing. Our paychecks have not risen at the same rate as cost of living. We have requested a 7-Year Step Plan to properly raise our pay.”

UE150 had been meeting regularly with top DHHS officials during the pandemic, but throughout all of 2022, they refused to meet with our union leaders. Recently, since the Town Hall we organized in September last year and all the media attention we have gained, they have been interested in meeting with us. At the Town Hall in New Bern, after our pressure again, Deputy Sec. Benton and Sec. Kinsley did commit to meeting with our union leaders again soon to hear our recommendations for safe staffing.



Patrice Jacobs speaks at DHHS Town Hall forum in New Bern, March 2, 2023



UE150 members Patrice Jacobs, DaNisha Rogers and Lora Tate talk with DHHS Sec. Kody Kinsley after DHHS Town Hall forum in New Bern, March 2, 2023

Facility Type	Change in # Served	% Change
Psychiatric Hospitals	-700	-32%
ADATCs	-1,447	-36%
Developmental Centers	-158	-15%
Neuro-Medical Treatment Centers	-126	-23%
Residential Programs for Children	-18	-27%

Greensboro City Workers Meet to Re-Build, Launch Campaign for Civil Service Board



Greensboro membership meeting on February 11, 2023

On Saturday February 11, members of the Greensboro City Workers Union met in-person for the first time since the pandemic. Many core activists were joined by several new employees learning about the union first the first time.

Bryce Carter, UE150 statewide Vice President, opened the meeting sharing the incredible history of the union since our founding of the Greensboro chapter in 2016: “I don’t think workers realize that

we have waged many struggles, and won many, many things for city workers here.” A few of the victories he laid out included:

- the victory raise wages to \$15 per hour,
- defending workers constitutional rights to speak out at city council meetings and to the press,
- winning fairer standards for performance evaluations and merit pay,
- winning annual wage increases,
- winning excessive heat safety policy for summer,
- winning fair pay through Step Pay Plan, and more.

During the meeting workers got to express their desires for changes for the city. Workers vowed to continue to organize more workers to join the union, and launch a city budget campaign.

At the end the meeting there was discussion about the state Legislative bill UE150 has been working with the Firefighters union on to expand job security through added grievance rights with a Civil Service Board. Workers agreed to take up this fight.



DHHS Members at Caswell Center sign up new member. Pictured Askari Young, Peggy Price and Regina Washington.

UE Local 150-CAAMWU Holds 33rd Annual MLK Celebration



Left to right: Tim Hunt, Theodis White, Rev. Doris Lindsey, Marvin Arrington, Sue Perry Cole, Kardel Simpson and Jimmie Thorne.

Whitakers, North Carolina

Members of UE Local 150-CAAMWU, which represents workers at Cummins Diesel, held their 33rd annual MLK Day “Workers Want Justice!” celebration at the Bloomer Hill Community Center on January 16.

The speaker, **Sue Perry Cole** of the NC Association of Community Development Corporations, began her remarks by honoring the late UE International Representative **Saladin Muhammad**, who passed away last fall.

“We can all bear witness today that Saladin Muhammad did so much for so many during his life of service by helping to organize, guide and lead ordinary people, especially working people and Black marginalized people, to understand the conditions they are confronting, then to build the unity and power required to change their circumstances and assert control over their own lives.”

Cole reviewed the recent surge of union organizing, noting that “After years of declining influence, unions are having a resurgence. Employees from companies from across the country are increasingly organizing as a means of asking for higher pay, better sick leave, more benefits, or safety and other changes to their working conditions.”

CAAMWU member **Marvin Arrington**, who also serves as a Nash County Commissioner, offered greetings to the meeting. **Rev. Doris Lindsey**, Pastor of Mann’s Chapel AME Church and a member of the Whitakers Town Council gave the prayer, and CAAMWU retiree **Jim Wrenn** introduced Cole. CAAMWU member **Theodis White** presided, and CAAMWU President **Jimmie Thorne** offered closing remarks.

After voting to authorize strike, Charlotte bus drivers host memorial for fallen driver



Members of SMART Local 1715 and UE Local 150 gather with Ethan Rivera's mother, Sylvia Aponte-Rivera on February 11 in Charlotte to commemorate Ethan's life and continue the struggle for a safe workplace.

On February 11, UE150 Recording Secretary, **Nichel Dunlap-Thompson**, and **Gia Lockhart**, CATS Operator and member of SMART Local 1715, organized a memorial in honor of the fallen operator, Ethan Rivera, who was shot and killed on the job last February.

After his death, the operators became more active in their union, and got more engaged in organizing. On February 18, 2022 there was a huge day of action where over 200 operators called out and gathered at the scene of the shooting. Southern Workers Assembly Fellow, Nichel Dunlap, was able to stand in solidarity and helped maintain the narrative that led the operators to a strike vote held on January 7, 2023.

SMART Local 1715 had been in contract negotiations for several months, and workers feared many of the needed safety improvements were not included in the new contract. However, after mass action, including voting down the tentative agreement and voting to authorize a strike, the union was able to secure some of the changes that workers needed.

According to Gia Lockhart, "We put up a good damn fight! This contract wasn't the best, but them mofo's finally gave us some respect because we demanded it. I hope y'all don't go back to sleep, we need to stay woke!"

The action on February 11 was not just a commemoration of Rivera's life, but a celebration for the operators of CATS. The level of consciousness that arose from these organizing efforts can only set the workers up for future success.

There were several members from UE150, BWFJ, SWA all in attendance. The memorial welcomed a crowd of at least 160 people. UE150 member, Elder **Angaza Laughinghouse** and Mother **Shafeah M'Balía** spoke on behalf of BWFJ. **Ashley Hawkins**, President of the Charlotte-Metrolina AFL-CIO Central Labor Council addressed the attendees as well as **Sylvia Aponte-Rivera**, Ethan's mother, who stated, "Losing my son was devastating for me and my family. We are still trying to understand it. I think if CATS had better precautions with their drivers, Ethan would still be here."