

# NOW Joins Local 237's Push For Pay Equity for School Safety Agents

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, April 15, 2013 5:00 pm

Teamsters Local 237 kept up the pressure in its equal-pay lawsuit for School Safety Agents April 8, holding a press conference outside City Hall to coincide with National Equal Pay Day.

The union has enlisted the National Organization for Women in its cause, for which the next court hearing is May 22. The lawsuit, which has been joined by 5,000 School Safety Agents, charges that the city underpays them by \$7,000 a year compared to the similar Special Officer title—also represented by Local 237—because those in the job are 70 percent female.

## 'Pay Inequity Embarrassment'

"New York City is looked at as a model for the nation. We're the gold standard," Local 237 President Gregory Floyd said. "Yet here today, one of the greatest examples of pay inequity stares us in the face. What an embarrassment."

Although the long-gestating case is now being heard in Federal court by Judge Sidney Stein, Local 237 has been entreating the city to settle and elevate the Agents' pay, an outcome that seems unlikely considering Mayor Bloomberg's refusal to embrace retroactive raises for any union in recent years.

None of the candidates for the 2013 mayoral election has signed up to Local 237's cause, although two City Council Members, Jessica Lappin and Rosie Mendez, endorsed it at a previous press conference.

"We're here today to ask the Mayor to get involved," Mr. Floyd said. "Talk to us. Tell the city lawyers to negotiate a settlement. School Safety Agents, 70 percent of whom are women, largely black and Latino, make \$7,000 less than their counterparts, and they do work that is more challenging. They protect our children."

A spokesman for the Mayor declined to respond.

## 'We Protect Children'

School Safety Agent Letasha Ellis, a city employee for 13 years, said her job was misunderstood by most. "We show up and proudly do what's expected of us: to protect our children," she said. "Most people think School Safety Agents sit at a desk and just sign people in. What they don't understand is that we patrol, we take weapons and drugs, and we make arrests just like Police Officers."

Sonia Ossorio, President of NOW's New York City chapter, added, "When we tackle pay inequity and women earn the same as what men earn, it is our families and our economy that will benefit. Equal pay for equal work needs to be the highest priority. Mayor Bloomberg needs to stop turning a blind eye to these women School Safety Agents and this egregious example of gender pay discrimination."

Attorney James Lindsay said there had still been no legal communication from the city, although it deposed more than 100 School Safety Agents for details about their jobs.

"So far they have had no substantive response," he said. "And the difficulty for the city is, what are you going to say? When you look at an Equal Pay Act case, you look at the duties and responsibilities. Is the city really going to say that providing safety in New York City public schools is less of a responsibility than providing safety in a homeless shelter or a city office shelter? How can Mayor Bloomberg say that with a straight face?"