

# School Safety Agents Turn Up Heat On Mayor in Pay-Discrimination Suit

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, May 12, 2014 5:00 pm

An attorney representing more than 5,000 School Safety Agents is hoping an agreement to settle a \$350-million pay-discrimination lawsuit against the city will come as early as this week, as city officials, women's-rights advocates and a national fair-wage icon weighed in on the debate last week at City Hall.

## Male-Dominated Titles Pay Better

In what Teamsters Local 237 calls the country's largest equal-pay lawsuit, the SSAs—70 percent of whom are women, according to union statistics—make 20 percent less money than other male-dominated peace-officer titles. The SSAs, who are trained by the NYPD, earn \$35,000 annually, which is \$7,000 less than their counterparts.

James Linsey, the attorney representing the agents, spoke following a May 9 rally of about 100 members of the local and the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women. City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito was among those urging the de Blasio administration to settle the suit.

“We call on the city to put an end to this lawsuit as quickly as possible and put an end to the ongoing unfairness that these dedicated public servants have endured for far too long,” said Ms. Mark-Viverito.

She equated the pay-gap with larger wage disparities throughout the city and country. The average earnings of women in New York City are 82 percent of what men make and 72 percent outside of the city, according to an April report from the City Comptroller's Office.

Lilly Ledbetter, whose wage-discrimination lawsuit against the Goodyear Tire Company eventually led to the Federal Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009, said the earnings gap was immoral as well as illegal and urged the city to settle.

## 'This is Not Right'

“A lot of these ladies have a lot of these years they've missed and they are single heads-of-households trying to pay their bills and have a retirement and take care of their families on less money,” she said. “This is not right.”

The SSAs are asking for more than \$70 million for each year since 2009, according to Mr. Linsey. That figure amounts to \$7,000 for each of the 5,000 named in the suit and doubles the figure for

“liquidated damages.” The suit also asks for a recalculation of the workers’ pensions, a figure not counted in the quoted number.

In April, a judge gave the two sides 90 days to reach an agreement, said Mr. Linsey, who nonetheless said he was optimistic about a solution by this week.

The lawsuit began in March 2010 under the Bloomberg administration. While running for Mayor, Bill de Blasio pledged to settle the lawsuit if elected.

### **‘End Pay Discrimination’**

“We just want to make sure in New York City—which is known as a leader in marriage equality, paid sick leave, affordable housing and yes, universal pre-K—pay discrimination no longer exists,” said the Local 237 President Gregory Floyd.

City Law Department spokesman Nicholas Paolucci declined to comment following the protest. A week earlier, he had said. “We have been working to resolve the issues raised by the plaintiffs, including resolving the litigation.”

Earlier in the week, the Mayor indicated a potential settlement could have ramifications that reach beyond School Safety Agent.

“Every legal case comes with complicated matters that have to be worked through,” Mr. de Blasio said during a May 5 press conference, according to Capital NY. “Every legal case involves potential precedent-setting dynamics. So once you’re in a legal dynamic, you have to work your way through it carefully.”

It was the local’s second rally in a month. While aggrieved, the workers and Ms. Ledbetter cheered and clapped following a surprise appearance by the Mayor, who walked outside of City Hall, on his way to an NYPD memorial ceremony. Organizers later presented the Mayor’s Office with a cake—with the number 7,000 written in icing—for Mr. de Blasio, who celebrated his birthday a day earlier.

Mr. Linsey said he had hoped the Mayor would join them to announce his solidarity for equal earnings. “These opportunities came and went and what’s going on today? The meter continues to run,” he said. “And we’re not talking small change; we’re talking about \$70 million a year.”