

School Safety Agents' Pay Equalized With Other '237' Peace Officers'

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Friday, August 29, 2014 5:00 pm

In a historic conclusion to a lengthy battle, Teamsters Local 237 and the de Blasio administration Aug. 26 announced a gender-equity settlement with approximately 5,000 mostly-female School Safety Agents to upgrade their salaries while also disclosing an accord on a wage contract offering the local's SSAs 10-percent raises over seven years, largely following a pattern set with other municipal labor unions.

The deals, if approved in one case by a judge and the other by the local's rank and file, would tie up two strands dangling since 2010, when Local 237's wage contract expired and SSAs, the largely female workers who are paid about \$7,000 less than other mostly male peace officers in different titles represented by the union, launched a gender-discrimination suit against the city.

'Says That We're Vital'

Kangela Moore, an SSA for 22 years, said of the settlement, "What this states is that New York City School Safety Agents are looked at as a vital entity in our New York City public-school system."

Under the terms of the \$38-million SSA settlement, the city will provide a retroactive \$7,000 payout to agents who had been employed for three years as of Sept. 1, as well as those who retired between March 5, 2010, and Aug. 31, 2014. The city will also offer pro-rated payments of up to \$3,000 for those who left without retiring and weren't fired for cause.

For Mayor de Blasio, the "landmark" deal, announced on Women's Equality Day in the courtyard of a Brooklyn school, would fulfill a campaign promise he made during the mayoral race that he would settle the suit. In rallies held earlier this year, Local 237 reminded the Mayor of his promise, getting support from City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, the National



VALUED IN A TANGIBLE WAY

VALUED IN A TANGIBLE WAY: Kangela Moore, a School Safety Agent for 22 years, thanked city officials for agreeing to a proposed contract that would bring SSA salaries on par with other mostly-male peace officers represented by Teamsters Local 237 when combined with a proposed legal settlement that would pay \$7,000 to 5,000 plaintiffs who launched a gender-equity suit. She said that the accords show that SSAs 'are looked at as a vital entity in our New York City public-school system.'

Organization for Women and Lilly Ledbetter, the woman whose gender-discrimination lawsuit against Goodyear Tire went to the U.S. Supreme Court and prompted a Federal law carrying her name.

“It’s the women in our lives that taught us time and time again to keep persevering,” Mr. de Blasio said. “Their talents were worthy of full recognition. I believe we need that for every woman in the city.”

He said the eight-month delay between the start of his term and the proposed settlement was caused by a backlog of settlements and the deal’s complexity.

Resolving Inequities

“It took work,” he said. “You’ve seen a variety of lawsuits as a result of past policies—not just in terms of school safety, you saw it in terms of firefighters, you saw it in terms of stop-and-frisk, you’ve seen it on a host of issues. We have worked to settle lawsuits in the appropriate manner, but they’re very detailed.”

The Mayor called the existing pay disparities “mistaken” but stopped short at blaming the previous administration for gender-based gaps, which existed well before ex-Mayor Michael Bloomberg took office.

To fix them, the city intends to establish a seven-step plan for SSAs—70 percent of whom are female—and Special Officers, the security agents who work at hospitals and homeless shelters, by March 2018. The revision would make the pay scales consistent across what Local 237 President Gregory Floyd called “the same type of work.”

“Our School Safety Agents protect the most precious commodity: our children,” he said. “And they work hard every day and [are] doing a tough job. All they want to be sure of is that they can put food on the table for their families.”

Without the settlement, SSA salaries would have risen under the larger wage deal from \$35,000 to less than \$39,000 over the next three years, Mr. Floyd said. If the settlement and contract are approved, those salaries would instead rise to approximately \$46,700 by March 2018.

SSAs, who are civilians working for the NYPD, can expect more than \$8,000 in one-time payments between the settlement and a \$1,000 ratification bonus even before the retroactive raises are considered.

‘No Trouble Selling This’

“I don’t think I’m going to have a hard time selling this to School Safety Agents,” the Local 237 president said, adding the other bargaining units would be just as willing to approve the raises

totaling 10.41 percent with compounding because of the far-less-generous terms offered by the Bloomberg administration.

The \$145.5-million tentative pact for the local's 8,200 SSAs (its other municipal workers and large Housing Authority contingent are not covered) extends retroactively from Sept. 26, 2010 through March 25, 2018 and largely matches the pattern set earlier this summer with District Council 37.

The compounded raises would begin with three years of 1-percent retroactive raises effective March 26 of 2012, 2013 and 2014, followed by a 1.5-percent increase next March, a 2.5-percent hike the following year and a 3-percent raise in 2017. It would also include a six-month extension with 0.78-percent increases added to an Additional Compensation Fund to pay for other benefits.

Other Key Provisions

The contract's other terms include provisions that have become hallmarks of this bargaining round: a \$1,000 one-time ratification bonus; a gainsharing plan for employees and the city to share in potential cost-savings; an effort to extend due-process rights to provisional employees; and anticipated, but as of yet undefined, health-care savings that will save the city \$77.5 million over the length of the contract.

With those savings, which are expected to total \$3.4 billion for the entire city workforce through 2018, the net cost of the contract is expected to be \$67.9 million.

The cost to equalize the pay for SSAs through 2018 would cost an additional \$47 million, according to the Mayor's Office.

Settling the lawsuit, brought by the SSAs but funded by the local, requires final approval by a Federal Judge in a hearing expected Sept. 12. City Comptroller Scott Stringer, who would also need to sign on to the agreement, said during the press conference he supported it.

Pragmatic Consideration

It's a fraction of what the union sought earlier this year, when an attorney working on the suit said it wanted more than \$70 million for each year since 2009: \$7,000 annually for each of the SSAs plus a doubling of the figure for "liquidated damages." But Mr. Floyd said such a ruling could have been years away, if it actually went the union's way.

"Our School Safety Agents do not have five or six years," he said. "They need to pay rent now, they need to put food on the table now, they need to pay bills now. And to risk that for a 'maybe' is something that people have to wonder, 'If I had a crystal ball, what if?'"

The deal figured to improve morale for thousands of members as they head back to city schools

this week and is likely to affect Local 237's upcoming officers election, with dissident candidate Jakwan Rivers challenging Mr. Floyd.

"I can honestly say, I went through the entire day, I didn't think about that," the union leader said. "I didn't because I'm busy basking in the moment of victory and I'm happy for the School Safety Agents and I'm happy for the members of Local 237 for achieving their contract."

Local 237 members will be sent ratification ballots sometime in the first two weeks in September, Mr. Floyd said. Ballots for the election are scheduled to be mailed out Sept. 18.