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Affects Maintenance Staff

Local 237 Objects To HA Work-Hour Stretch

By DAN ROSENBLUM Updated 1 hr ago



GREG FLOYD: Says schedule change violates contract.

Teamsters Local 237 last week filed an improper-practice petition challenging a Housing Authority plan to extend work hours for some of the 8,000 public-housing employees it represents.

The staggered-scheduling policy, announced March 21 and expected to begin in May, will offer extended hours for tenants seeking repairs outside maintenance workers' normal 8-a.m.-to-4:30-p.m. schedule. It will allow more time on Saturdays for administrative work and for residents to schedule meetings with property managers.

'Demands Have Changed'

“For years, NYCHA’s budget has changed, but not our daily hours of operations,” Chairwoman Shola Olatoye said in a video message to employees, whom she called the HA’s “unsung heroes.” “Our buildings and the demands of our work have changed, but not our hours. The staff schedules are not setting you up for success.”

The Flexible Operations program—shortened to “FlexOps”—is part of the “NextGeneration” plan to shore up the ailing agency’s finances, which also includes reducing central-office administrators and allowing developers to build mostly market-rate housing on underused parcels.

FlexOps will be introduced at five developments in The Bronx, three in Manhattan and two each in Brooklyn and Queens. It changes a system that dates back to 1969 and would add two hours to the beginning of the work day and 3 1/2 in the evening, HA officials said.

At least two workers and a supervisor will be available for up to 14 hours per weekday. Caretakers, in addition to the normal hours, can work two alternative shifts: from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. or from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Employees will work the same number of hours per week and schedules will be open to voluntary sign-ups and subject to seniority rules.

“It would be a disaster to their family life,” Teamsters Local 237 President Greg Floyd said of the logistical and financial impact of the scheduling on workers. “They have children that they can’t find child-care for that time of morning, or that time of night.”

Mr. Floyd has grown more critical of the de Blasio administration’s handling of the HA, particularly regarding worker safety, the leasing of land to private developers he said could lead to privatization, and mold and lead-paint concerns raised recently by the U.S. Department of Justice. In January, he and Manhattan Assemblyman Keith Wright called for a state takeover of the HA.

He called Ms. Olatoye a “failure” and said Mayor de Blasio “can’t seem to get anything right.”

The local filed an improper practice petition with the Office of Collective Bargaining March 23 and is planning a May 2 protest outside the HA’s lower Manhattan headquarters.

To demonstrate the program’s benefits to tenants, the HA released supportive statements from five City Council Members, representatives of community boards and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Regional Administrator Holly Leicht. It also said that 94 percent of 1,400 residents surveyed supported extending worker hours to improve living conditions.

'A Political Smokescreen'

"I couldn't find the 6 percent of the people that say they don't want these good things," Mr. Floyd said. "One hundred percent of the residents want them. However, most of them are smart and they realize this is just another political smokescreen and mirror by this administration."

The local said it would only support the new policy if it addressed safety concerns and hired more workers, according to the filing.

"NYCHA's attempts to persuade individual workers to agree to something that it could not secure at the bargaining table, or later from the bargaining agent, is nothing more than a desperate attempt to grab a PR bounce to mask its foundational health and safety, i.e. mold and lead, problems," the local wrote. "Unfortunately, by flouting its legal obligations, NYCHA has both undermined Local 237 and, at the same time, placed its workforce in harm's way."

In response to the local's objections, the HA forwarded a statement from the Office of Labor Relations that noted the contract language stated the work schedule shall "generally" be during the traditional business hours, but that the employees may be required to work a "special schedule."

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"NYCHA has utilized this provision in the past to create permanent alternate shifts for our Community Center Caretakers and Emergency Services Division," it said. "Thus, it is clear from the contractual language and parties' practice that this provision permits the Authority to implement a permanent shift with hours other than 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m."

Questions on interpreting the contract would be decided by an arbitrator, according to the HA.

Mr. Floyd countered that the agency sought a flexible work schedule among its contract demands. "I wouldn't demand something I already have," he said.

While the authority said it worked with the union since last July, Mr. Floyd said he was caught off guard by the announcement of the plan and hadn't heard back from the Mayor about the plan after a March 15 phone call. Negotiations were contentious, including a Feb. 22 meeting in which local officials walked out on HA officials.

"We have met with the union for months trying to work something out," city Labor Commissioner Robert W. Linn said in a phone interview. He said Local 237 raised safety issues and those of "child-care and family-care obligations."

"We need to expand service to the residents in a way that is safe for the workers," he said.

Safety Precautions

The HA said union-management safety-and-security assessments evaluated radios, lighting in public spaces, doors and other places where buildings can be entered. Those working the extended hours will be issued protective equipment such as a reflective vest, flashlight and radio.

"Our residents deserve the same fundamental services most New Yorkers take for granted," Mr. de Blasio said in a statement. "These reforms mean that when our residents walk out to work in the morning, it will be to a clean hallway and lobby. And they mean repairs will come sooner, because we can make them on a schedule that serves working families."

