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Stadium crews get raise

Maryland agency approves \$11.30 'living wage' next year

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Under pressure to raise wages for part-time janitorial workers at Camden Yards, the Maryland Stadium Authority voted yesterday to pay them the state's new \$11.30-an-hour "living wage," starting next spring.

The 5-2 decision came after the men and women who clean the state-owned Orioles and Ravens stadiums on game days postponed a hunger strike this week to give the agency time to come up with a binding living-wage agreement.

The hunger strike, which was to have started Monday, was called off yesterday.

Members and leaders of the United Workers Association, a human rights organization founded by homeless day laborers in Baltimore, called the stadium authority's vote a victory after three years of trying to obtain higher wages and better working conditions at the stadiums.

"I'm very excited. We all are," said Carl Johnson, a UWA organizer and former Camden Yards worker.

"The next step is to make sure workers who are currently working at Camden Yards will have a fair opportunity to keep their jobs in the next season and get a living wage," Johnson said.

The workers who pick up trash at the stadiums during and after each home game now earn \$7 an hour.

The state's living-wage law, which takes effect Oct. 1, requires state government contractors to pay their employees \$11.30 an hour in the Baltimore-Washington corridor, and \$8.50 across the rest of the state.

Because the law applies to employees who work 13 consecutive weeks over the course of a contract, it does not cover the stadium cleaners, who only work during home games.

But Frederick W. Puddester, chairman of the stadium authority, said he supports a living wage for the cleaners and recommended to the board that the higher wage be specified in a request for proposals from vendors seeking to bid on the cleaning services.

"It's my position that the policy of the state law is to pay \$11.30 an hour," Puddester said. "I like to see your support."

Pact expires in Jan.

The current three-year vendor contract expires in January, when the Ravens' football season ends. The living-wage provision will take effect in the spring, when the Orioles' season begins.

Bids on a new pact are expected to be sought this fall.

The stadium authority has contracted for janitorial services with a Michigan firm, which in turn hires subcontractors that employ the temporary workers at Oriole Park and M&T Bank Stadium.

Ravens pay directly

The stadium authority, which receives rent payments from the Orioles, will pay the cost of the wage increase at Oriole Park, Puddester said.

The Ravens, however, pay directly for M&T Bank Stadium operations and maintenance, and would likely have to bear the cost of the higher wages, Puddester said.

Dennis B. Mather, a stadium authority board member who voted against the change, wondered whether that could mean an increase in Ravens ticket prices.

In an interview after the meeting, Puddester called that speculation. Ravens officials could not be reached last night.

Mather said he was also concerned that current workers may lose out because the raise in pay might lead to greater competition for the work.

Candlelight vigil

"We may end up with different contractors coming in and their process of hiring people may be different," Mather said after the meeting. "Someone is up for a raise; it may not be them."

Camden Yards workers celebrated the vote last night with a candlelight vigil at Light Street Presbyterian Church in Federal Hill. The United Workers Association is scheduled to hold a victory concert tomorrow.

Greg Rosenthal, a spokesman for the association, said the group will work with the stadium authority to make sure current workers benefit from the pay increase.

The group is also addressing working conditions at the stadiums.

The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation is investigating allegations of unlawful labor practices against the cleaning subcontractors.

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