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Service Workers in Silicon Valley City Win Added Job Security

By Paul Nyhan | Equal Voice News (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/author/paul-nyhan/>) on March 30, 2017 4:04 pm

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Workers gained new protections in Silicon Valley on March 21 when the Santa Clara City Council voted unanimously to allow food and building service workers to keep their jobs for an extended period after a company changes how it handles their work.



Workers in the Silicon Valley city of Santa Clara recently won added job protections, thanks to labor organizing efforts in this increasingly expensive area. Photo courtesy of UNITE HERE Local 19

Under the new ordinance, larger companies will retain janitors, food service workers, security guards and other building service workers for a minimum of 90 days after choosing another contractor, moving work in-house, or moving work out to contractors, according to UNITE HERE Local 19.

In Silicon Valley, lower-wage workers have been seeking greater stability within the region's dominant technology industry, which often relies on outside firms to provide building services, according to Silicon Valley

Rising (<http://www.siliconvalleyrising.org>), a grassroots coalition of organizations, including Working Partnerships USA (<http://www.wpusa.org>), and workers.

"This new ordinance will provide much-needed job security to some of our most vulnerable workers," Silicon Valley Rising said in a statement.

The push for the retention ordinance was born a few years ago partly after a tech giant laid off its entire cafeteria staff the day before Thanksgiving, according to Jeffrey Buchanan, director of public policy at Working Partnerships USA.

Overall, "these are workers who are making around \$20,000 a year in these jobs. Layoffs, particularly in the holiday season, are one more hurdle...to thrive in this region," he said.

As the tech industry has exploded in Silicon Valley, cafeteria workers, janitors and other lower-wage residents have been buffeted by the accompanying rising cost of living.

One tech giant switched its food-service provider twice over the last three years, and "I worry constantly about losing my job to a contractor change," Maria Guerrero, who works in a cafeteria and belongs to Local 19, said in a statement. The measure will cover offices and entertainment venues, while exempting some small businesses, according to the union.

The new ordinance is only the latest step in a campaign to improve working conditions for these workers. Last year, the San Jose City Council unanimously voted (<http://www.equalvoiceforfamilies.org/san-jose-workers-win-15-minimum-wage-in-heart-of-silicon-valley>) to boost the city's minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2019, a move that will increase hourly pay for 115,000 workers.

Now, advocates are hoping to work with the county to develop an Office of Labor Standards that would focus on enforcing worker rights.

The office would "leverage these policy successes (and make sure they are being implemented, effectively implemented (and that) workers have a voice," Buchanan said.

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