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## **CSS Report: Unionization Boosts Wages and Benefits for City's Security Officers**

Six years after conducting an initial study of working conditions, compensation and the composition of security officers at some of the city's largest commercial office buildings in the post-9/11 era, an [updated report](#) by the Community Service Society of New York (CSS) has found that unionization of the industry has played a significant role in raising wage levels and benefits for security officers.

Only a small segment of the industry was unionized in 2004 – about 1,000 security officers were represented by Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). While not highly paid, these union members had on average higher wages and more comprehensive benefits compared to their non-union counterparts.

By 2011, more than 10,000 workers were represented by 32BJ. This surge in unionization contributed to a boost in wages. From 2004 to 2011, the median hourly wage for security officers increased by more than 10 percent, after adjusting for inflation. This surpassed the increase for other low-income jobs in the city, most of which saw their real wages decline for the same period.

“Changes in the city's security officer workforce over the last decade serve as a reminder of the critical role unions play in raising wages and improving conditions for low-wage workers. Though still a relatively low-wage occupation, these are jobs worth keeping in a distressed economy because they offer decent wages, benefits and opportunities to advance within the industry at a time when such jobs are in very short supply,” said David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society.

The report, [\*Upgrading Security: Unionization and Changes in the Workforce, Wages, and Standards in the New York City Security Industry, 2004-2011\*](#), was released today. It analyzed publicly-available data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey and the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Employment Statistics. An earlier CSS report published in 2006 and entitled, *Shortchanging Security: How Poor Training, Low Pay and Lack of Job Protection for Security Guards Undermine Public Safety in New York City*, first highlighted the public implications of a security industry that is ill-trained, poorly paid and characterized by high turnover.

Overall, the new report found a correlation between concentrated union activity and wage gains in the industry. The higher wages in the unionized sector also had the effect of boosting wages in the non-union sector.

“Our goals when we started the campaign to organize security officers included protecting the public, upgrading standards in the industry and improving lives. Our work is not done, but the results of this study show that we are making significant progress toward those goals,” said Denis Johnston, SEIU 32BJ Security Division Director.

Highlights from the report are summarized below:

### **Demographic trends**

The workforce of security officers in the city has grown older and become more educated overall. In 2010, nearly one-quarter of all security officers were ages 55 or older, compared to 16.9 percent in 2000. More than half (50 percent) had at least some college, compared to 37.4 percent a decade before. These findings suggest that younger, less educated workers are no longer finding the same level of opportunity for secure employment in the city’s security industry.

### **Wage trends**

Between 2004 and 2011, inflation-adjusted hourly wages for security guards in New York City increased by 10.3 percent, from \$11.78 to \$12.99. This surpassed the inflation-adjusted wage increases for security guards in the New York metropolitan area and the nation as a whole.

### **Economic security**

While hourly pay for security officers in New York City has risen in recent years, especially relative to other low-wage occupations, the current median wage of \$12.99 an hour still leaves a full-time, year-round worker earning well below the low-income threshold of \$17.24 per hour for a family of three. Twenty-two percent of the city’s security workers reported receiving food stamps compared to 12 percent for the nation. About 20 percent received Medicaid compared to seven percent for the nation in 2010. Less than 60 percent received employee health insurance.

Union security officers do better; median starting hourly rates across current contracts are \$14.35 an hour, as of July 1, 2012. Union contracts also typically include better benefits than non-union workers receive—and these benefits form an important part of the total compensation package. According to 32BJ, the goal is for all security contracts to provide at least employee health coverage by July 2013, with some including family coverage.

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*The [Community Service Society of New York](#) (CSS) draws on a 169-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. We respond to urgent, contemporary challenges through applied research, advocacy, litigation, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.*