

CSS POLICY REPORT

Shortchanging Security:

How Poor Training, Low Pay and
Lack of Job Protection for Security Guards
Undermine Public Safety in New York City

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Executive Summary

Each morning as New Yorkers come to work, they take it for granted that someone is controlling who else is entering the building, someone is screening the packages arriving from places near and far, someone is patrolling the corridors, and someone will organize an orderly evacuation if there is a fire or other threat to public safety. That someone is a security guard. New York City's 63,000 security guards provide the first line of defense for building tenants and visitors. Given the significance of their responsibilities, the public might also take it for granted that the firms supplying security guard services would provide their workers with an adequate wage, benefits such as health care, and sufficient training to competently respond to emergencies. This report finds that, for the most part, they do not. Because the guards are being shortchanged, so is public safety.

We entitled this study **Shortchanging Security** because both the guards and the public are ill-served by many security guard service companies. As a rule, the guards are poorly compensated and few receive benefits such as health insurance. The guards are not provided the training or the job security they need to effectively enforce safety procedures. Understandably, morale among the security guard workforce is low, and employee turnover is high.

Shortchanging Security looks at these issues through two lenses. First, we utilize data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census along with secondary sources to explore some basics about the workforce. The data tell us:

- The security guard workforce is largely composed of men of color. Over eight in ten guards are male. A majority (56 percent) are African-American. Another fifth (21 percent) are Hispanic.
- The security guard industry is an important source of employment for New Yorkers who do not have a college education. Over a quarter of the city's guards have not completed high school. Another four-in-ten hold a high school degree, but no higher level of education. Nonetheless, more than a third of security guards have attended some college or hold four-year degrees.
- Security guards are poorly paid. The median hourly wage for guards in the New York City area is only \$10.14. The median for all workers in the metropolitan area is \$18.39.
- Few guards receive employer provided health insurance or paid sick leave.

- The training guards receive is minimal. Some firms do not even provide their workers the minimum mandated by New York State law.
- Turnover in the security guard industry nationally is as high as 300 percent.

In the second part of [Shortchanging Security](#) we let the workers do the talking. The comments made in focus groups composed of non-union security guards working in prime Manhattan office buildings give life to the dry statistics.

- These guards could be characterized as members of the working poor. They live from paycheck to paycheck. They cannot afford the health care they need. Yet, they often earn too much to qualify for public benefits such as food stamps or Medicaid.
- The non-union guards were highly critical of managerial practices. They described the training they received as minimal or non-existent. They reported that supervisors often blamed frontline workers for security lapses, contributing to a sense of fear for their job security. Lack of training and lack of support, they told us, undermined their ability to serve the public.

In sharp contrast, guards who are members of SEIU Local 32BJ reported:

- Their wages, health benefits, and pensions were sufficient to give them a sense that they could support their families.
- They had received sufficient training and enjoyed enough job security to allow them to approach their work with confidence and professionalism.

It is essential, particularly post 9/11, that the city is perceived as a safe environment for business and tourism. The implications for the public are obvious. As our first line of defense, we need workers who are paid enough to care about their jobs and are trained enough to handle challenging situations. As evidenced in our interviews with union members, when guards have a stake in their work, they are motivated to do it well.

There are other implications for the city as well. The security industry could become a source of good jobs for New Yorkers who lack a college degree, a critical need in our “post-industrial” city. The existence of living wage jobs in the unionized sector demonstrates that this is an achievable goal.

I.

Introduction

The first line of defense for many New Yorkers is a private security guard. In businesses and nonprofit agencies, at retail stores and sporting events, in schools and religious institutions, security guards control building access, inspect packages, and maintain order. In 2002 the security guard occupation accounted for 63,230 jobs in New York, about 1.6% of citywide employment.¹

“...the security guard occupation accounted for 63,230 jobs in New York City...”

We begin **Shortchanging Security** with a statistical profile of New Yorkers who earn their daily bread as security guards. Drawing on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census, as well as secondary sources, we explore who works in the occupation, their wages and fringe benefits, the extent of the training they receive, and the impact of these factors on rates of employee turnover. These are not just significant issues for the guards: given the importance of security in our post 9/11 world, the public also has a strong stake in the morale and professionalism of these first-responders.

“...given the importance of security in our post 9/11 world, the public also has a strong stake in the morale and professionalism of these first-responders.”

The connection between compensation, training, and workers’ ability to effectively protect us becomes even clearer when we stand aside and let the workers speak for themselves. What they say in the second part of the report, which is based on five focus groups, is

¹ New York State Department of Labor, Occupational Employment Statistics survey. <http://www.labor.state.ny.us>

simple and significant. Security firms that undervalue their workers by offering them low wages, inadequate benefits, and insufficient training are shortchanging public safety.

II.

Security Industry Profile: Findings from a Review of Occupational Data

Who Are New York City’s Security Guards?

A majority (roughly six in ten) of the city’s security guards are employed by the Security Guards and Patrol Services industry, which supplies guards on a contract basis to businesses, institutions, and government agencies. The city’s remaining guards—the “in house” or “proprietary” portion of the occupation—are employed directly by the firm, institution, or public agency they service.²

“... a workforce largely comprised of less well educated men of color.”

Table 1 compares security guards who work in the contract industry with the total New York City workforce along several demographic dimensions. This table depicts a workforce largely comprised of less well educated men of color.

- **Gender:** Security guard workers are overwhelmingly male; over eight in ten are men. In contrast, men make up just over half of the total city workforce.
- **Race/Ethnicity:** The security guard workforce is overwhelmingly comprised of people of color. The most dramatic differences between the security guard and citywide workforce is in the much higher share of

² Although industry-specific occupational employment distributions are not published for New York City, the employment distribution of security guards in local industries may be inferred using a national industry/occupation matrix and assuming local intra-industry occupational compositions are more or less similar to national ones.

TABLE 1

**CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW YORK CITY
SECURITY GUARDS IN COMPARISON TO TOTAL
NEW YORK CITY WORKFORCE**
(NUMBERS ARE PERCENT OF TOTAL)

	Contract Industry Security Guards %	Total NYC Workforce %
Gender		
Female	16.2	48.2
Male	83.8	51.8
Age		
16-24	20.5	12.2
25-54	62.2	74.4
55 or older	17.3	13.4
Race/Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic White	11.4	41.2
Non-Hispanic Black	55.8	21.8
Non-Hispanic Asian	4.4	11.0
Non-Hispanic Other	7.4	3.9
Hispanic, any race	21.0	22.1
Educational Attainment		
Less than high school graduate	26.2	17.7
High school graduate	39.4	21.7
Some college	26.5	24.7
Bachelor's degree or higher	7.9	35.9
Nativity		
Citizen by birth	55.3	56.6
Foreign born	44.7	43.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census, Public Use Microdata Sample.

the security workforce that is non-Hispanic black (one-half against one-fifth) and correspondingly low share that is non-Hispanic white (roughly one-in-ten compared to four-in-ten).

- **Age:** The majority of security guards are “prime age” workers; 62.2 percent are 25 to 54 years of age, the period when people are most likely to be supporting families and reaching their peak earnings. This is the case despite the fact that as a group, security guards tend to have higher proportions of both younger and older workers than the city workforce as a whole. Roughly one-in-five security guards are 16 through 24 years of age. Only one-in-eight of the total city workforce falls

“The most dramatic differences between the security guard and citywide workforce is in the much higher share of the security workforce that is non-Hispanic black (one-half against one-fifth) and correspondingly low share that is non-Hispanic white (roughly one-in-ten compared to four-in-ten).”

within that age group. At the other end of the spectrum, a somewhat larger share of security guards is over 55 compared with workers citywide (17.3 percent versus 13.4 percent).

- **Educational attainment:** A relatively high share (a little more than one-in-four versus a bit more than one-in-six) of security guards have not attained either a high school degree or GED. Nearly another four-in-ten guards have no more than a high school degree compared to two-in-ten workers citywide. Fewer than one-in-ten guards have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. By contrast, over a third of the city workforce has attained that level of education.

- **Nativity:** Similar proportions of the security guard and total city workforce are foreign born (nearly 45 percent).

Security Guard Wages, Fringe Benefits, and Training

The racial composition, relative youth, and limited education characterizing the city's contract industry security guards are all attributes of workers who, typically, earn low wages. But industry practices also play a role in keeping wages down. Firms compete on the basis of price and labor is a big cost factor. So despite the responsibility inherent in the job and the public's need for a well-trained security workforce, firms devote little time or resources to their workers' professional development. Finally, relatively few guards are covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

TABLE 2
WAGES FOR SELECTED NEW YORK METROPOLITAN
AREA OCCUPATIONS (NOVEMBER 2004)

Occupation	Median Hourly Wages (\$)
All Workers	18.39
Security Guards	10.14
Telemarketers	13.28
Janitors and Cleaners	12.65
Landscaping & Groundskeeping Workers	12.79
Tire Repairers and Changers	15.24
Truck Drivers, Light and Delivery	14.26
Laborers and Material Movers, Hand	10.58

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics survey. "November 2004 Metropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates." Data are for the New York Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area and include New York City and Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester, NY, counties.

Table 2 indicates median hourly wages for New York City metropolitan area guards are well below the median for all workers (\$10.14 versus \$18.39). Furthermore, guards earn less than workers in a number of other occupations that also require little in the way of higher education or job-specific training.

These low wage rates are not counterbalanced by generous employer-provided benefits. Recent surveys in New York City, California, Texas, and Florida find that few guards receive health insurance and paid sick leave benefits.³ Although full-time workers in contract guard firms often receive paid vacation time, guards in part-time positions—about one out of four in the New York metropolitan area—typically receive no fringe benefits at all.⁴

Firms appear to devote few resources to the professional development of their entry-level employees. Under the Security Guard Act of 1992, an individual in New York State can obtain a security guard license if he or she is at least 18 years old, has a good moral character, the mental and physical competency to perform the job, completes an eight-hour pre-assignment course, has no record of discharge from a correctional or law enforcement agency for incompetence or misconduct,

"The annual job turnover rate in the contract industry nationally is as high as 300 percent."

and passes a federal criminal background check showing no convictions for felonies or certain misdemeanors. Legally required guard training is limited to 16 hours of on-the-job training and an eight-hour annual in-service course.⁵

However, investigations suggest a significant fraction of New York guards do not receive even this mandated minimum. A recent New York State Comptroller's Office audit of state contracts with private security guard companies found that 13 percent of its sample of contract security guards employed at state agencies were unlicensed.⁶ A study conducted by the New York City Public Advocate reported that 17 percent of the New York City contract security guards it surveyed indicated they received less than the required eight hours of pre-assignment training, and 12 percent of these reported receiving no training at all. These findings are all the more striking because of the sample selected: guards employed by large firms and assigned to Class A commercial buildings and landmarks in Manhattan.⁷

The Upshot for Workers and the Public

The low wages and paltry benefit packages firms offer, coupled with the limited opportunities for training and career advancement that typify the security guard service industry, take their toll on workers' commitment to the job. The annual job turnover rate in the contract industry nationally is as high as 300 percent.⁸ For many workers, it would seem, a stint as a security guard is not a career, but rather a last resort taken by those with few other options. The lack of training and high rate of turnover in the security guard workforce also impact public safety. Are New Yorkers who place their safety in the hands of contract firms being well-served?

³ Office of the New York City Public Advocate. 2005. *Under trained, Under paid, and Under prepared: Security Officers Report Deficient Safety Standards in Manhattan Office Buildings*. <http://www.publicadvocate.nyc.gov>.; Peter D. Hart Associates. 2002.

A post-September 11 report on surveys of security officers in California, Texas, and Florida. Viewed at <http://www.seiu.org>.

⁴ Tabulated from the 2000 Decennial Census Public Use Microdata Sample; Canton, Lucien G., 1996 *Guard Force Management*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.

⁵ New York State General Business Law Article 7-A. "Security Guard Act." <http://www.dos.state.ny.us>.

⁶ Office of the State Comptroller. 2003. *Statewide Security Guard Services*. <http://www.osc.state.ny.us>.

⁷ Office of the New York City Public Advocate. op.cit.

⁸ Estimate from Freedonia Group, Inc., quoted in Maher, Kris. "Union Campaign to Organize Security Guards Scores a Victory." *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2005.

III.

The Workers' Point of View: Findings from Interviews with Security Guards in Manhattan's Prime Commercial Buildings

The preceding section described a poorly paid security guard workforce. It suggests low wages and meager benefits sap employee morale and commitment to the job. To gain a better understanding of how their pay, benefits, and training affect morale, living standards, and ultimately job performance and public safety, we conducted a series of professionally facilitated group interviews with 38 people currently employed as security guards. We focused on the sector of the industry hired to protect office buildings in the prime midtown and downtown areas of Manhattan below 59th Street. This segment of the market comprises some of the most expensive commercial real estate in the city, if not the world, tenants that can well afford quality and ill afford security risks.

Focus group participants were recruited who are representative of the demographic portrait the Census data provide. Three focus groups were conducted with non-unionized workers. Two groups were composed of security guards who are members of Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union. The method for recruiting participants and conducting the focus groups is described more fully in Appendix A.

"Non-union guards described a life of falling between the cracks."

Whether or not the workers were union members, the guards described their work as alternating moments of high stress and periods of quiet and tedium. The participants, regardless of their union status, see themselves as being on the frontlines protecting property and people, yet they are viewed dismissively as "toy cops" and not accorded the respect due their responsibilities. Here is where the similarities ended: when workers

described their standard of living, morale, and confidence to do their job properly, striking differences emerged between the unionized and non-union guards.

"Non-union guards described their training sessions as perfunctory exercises, where they were basically handed a certificate for little more than showing up and paying the fee."

The stories the non-union guards told were consistent with the government survey data. They described themselves as struggling, making so little they could barely get by. Some were forced to rely on public benefits, such as Medicaid for their children, food stamps, and public housing. But more often they described a life of falling between the cracks. They didn't make enough to afford the basics, yet earned too much to qualify for government programs. They felt they were denied raises the security firms could well afford given how much the companies were charging for their security services. Nearly all labored without a single day of paid sick leave and, given their economic straits, this meant they had no choice but to come to work sick. While some firms offered health insurance, the workers told us they could not afford to take it given the high cost of their share of the premiums. The training they received was described as minimal to non-existent. They gave examples of being sent to annual

"In stark contrast, the 32BJ union security guards (who account for a small fraction of the city's security guards, about 3,000 of the 63,000) described themselves as earning enough to make ends meet, with health insurance and pensions providing a sense of financial security."

mandatory training sessions as perfunctory exercises, where they were basically handed a certificate for little more than showing up and paying the fee.

The perceived lack of job security also weighed heavily on the minds of the non-unionized workers and undermined their ability to do their jobs. They felt that there was no one watching their backs in a cutthroat environment, and they risked being arbitrarily fired without cause or even for so much as talking to a union representative. The lack of job security at times made them reluctant to enforce building policies.

“...non-unionized workers are much more likely to describe their pay as ‘lousy’ or ‘dead end’ with no raises and barely enough to get by.”

In stark contrast, the 32BJ union security guards (who account for a small fraction of the city’s security guards, about 3,000 of the 63,000) described themselves as earning enough to make ends meet, with health insurance and pensions providing a sense of financial security. They reported receiving formal training that was viewed as worthwhile. As a result, they approached their jobs with a higher level of confidence and professionalism, taking pride in their ability to handle the challenges of screening often difficult, disrespectful and sometimes abusive building tenants and visitors in a polite, yet effective manner. Their sense of being rewarded with decent—though not high—wages, and particularly the value they placed on receiving health benefits, was expressed in terms of having a real stake in their jobs that motivates them to do their best. They described situations of long tenure at their work sites that led to feelings of being a part of the building, with a strong commitment to their jobs.

These themes are developed in more detail in the following section, with supporting quotes (denoted in italics) drawn from the focus group interviews.

Adequacy of Wages and Standard of Living: Making Ends Meet or the Working Poor?

Union members generally describe their pay as “good,” “decent” and their lives as “comfortable,” “managing” and “making ends meet.” Though some held second jobs, it was generally seen as more of a positive choice than out of necessity. For example, one man was trying to save up to get married. While they realize there are limits to how much they can earn in this line of work, and many wish they could earn more, they describe a life where they “can’t complain” and are economically self-sufficient and solidly working class.

“I am OK, I’m comfortable. I’m happy. One, because I got a reasonable salary that I can survive on. I can provide for my family. I can sleep well at night. Don’t have to seek a second job and medical benefits. Those are the two principles—decent salary and medical benefits and the union places a key role in protection to you and your family.”

“My salary, I can’t complain. But I would want a little more. If you are by yourself it would be hard to pay the bills.”

“I manage on my own.”

“I am making ends meet.”

In contrast, non-unionized workers are much more likely to describe their pay as “lousy” or “dead end” with no raises and barely enough to get by. Some talked about relying on public benefits, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and public housing to survive. But more typically, these workers described themselves as falling between the cracks—not earning enough to pay the basic bills but too much to qualify for food stamps or Medicaid. They described themselves as living “check to check” and struggling to get by. Many longed to have a little bit extra, just so they could buy their child a Christmas present, eat lunch out for once, or be able to treat themselves to something—even if it was just a bag of chips. Though dissatisfied with their pay, they were thankful to have a job at all and felt they were better off than the alternatives of welfare or “being out on the street with a paper cup.” Though holding steady jobs, the lives they described were those of the working poor.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE PAY?

"Lousy."

"Terrible."

"Some pay lousy and are late with the money or the pay isn't right. Tell you, you have to wait 'til the next pay cycle. I was working two jobs for months. I need more than \$8.75 an hour".

"Living check to check."

"By the time the check comes in, it is already gone."

"This Christmas that was past I couldn't get nothing for my kid. Nothing. It hurts real bad because he'll say, 'You have a job.'"

"Kids can be real mean. . . oh your daddy's poor. You don't want your kid to be embarrassed. You just want to give them a little something."

"I would much rather be working and making a little money than be out on the street asking for money. It is a lot easier doing it like this than go around with a paper cup."

"I had to get a Medicaid card. I got it because I am a parent."

"First they tell me I am making too much money! I went to HR and they told me I could get food stamps but no, I still make too much."

"Medicaid wouldn't accept you because we make too much. They would take my daughter."

"Food stamps. We can't get them. They say I make too much."

"The companies can be greedy. They get \$20.50 from the building but they can't give you a one dollar raise!"

It's Not Just the Money: Health Insurance, Paid Sick Leave and Pensions

Union security guards described getting a package of benefits including health coverage, paid leave, and

pensions. Their comments reveal how critical the receipt of benefits—particularly health insurance—is to their sense of economic security and getting a fair deal.

"What is good about the union is the health insurance."

"It is good to be union. They have everything you need. If you have to go to the doctor. Health benefits. Protection for your family, retirement, 401K. When you do 10 years, when the time comes and you are of age, you get at least a half a pension. You need a security blanket that the union is providing you."

"Some non-union workers don't get any health benefits. But we get sick pay and health insurance."

Some non-unionized guards were offered health benefits, but it was the exception rather than the rule and dependent on the building they were assigned to. Even if offered benefits, most said that paying their share of the premium would take such a large chunk out of their take-home pay that they could not afford to do it. As a result, they described themselves as going without health insurance and just "praying" they would be all right, not going to the doctor, relying on the city's health department, or resorting to going to a hospital and being saddled with a large debt.

"It isn't just the money, it's other things. Like when you get sick. It is a combination, money and benefits, then we can feel that we have a normal job like everybody else who has benefits. I said, damn, what, are we the only ones who don't have benefits? You'd feel normal like everybody else and feel better about yourself."

"I don't go to the doctor. I can't afford it. The Medicaid is for my boy."

"My new company said if you want medical benefits you will have to pay x dollars a month. You wind up paying half of your paycheck a month to get benefits but I haven't done that yet. I just pray and I hope I'm all right."

"Gotta go to work even if I'm sick."

"I don't have any benefits. If I call in sick I don't get paid."

"I got sick and I went to the hospital and they charged me \$1,000 so I have to go work to pay that off. I do it over time. I owe the hospital \$1,000 which will take me about a year."

Job Security: Enabling Guards to Perform their Roles with Vigor

When asked about whether there were advantages to being in a union, members of 32BJ cited job security as an important element. Significantly, perceiving they had some measure of job protection enabled them to perform their duties “with more vigor.”

“Job protection. You have a right to a hearing.”

“You feel that there is a level of someone caring about you so you do your job with more vigor. Because of the protection, you enjoy doing more. You don’t have the fear.”

In contrast, the non-unionized employees spoke of a constant fear that they could be arbitrarily fired without cause, including for so much as talking to a union representative. This undermined their confidence in dealing with difficult situations and uniformly enforcing building policies intended to insure building safety and security. In some instances, they reported being directed to do things that violated building policies with no recourse if they failed to comply—only the threat of losing their job.

“A lot of building management don’t have your back. They tell you to do one thing and as soon as something hits the fan, they are going to leave you out by yourself.”

“I am a fire guard. My job is to do what the FSD [fire safety director] asks me to do. Last week I go to work and the FSD cuts out for four hours. Leave it to me to sniff out a slimy guy. He comes back four hours later. Asks me to check some the fire extinguishers. That’s my job to do what he says so I go check the fire extinguishers. I fill a report out and on my report that five were a year expired which means that they weren’t checked twice in one year. So this is what he says, ‘Sit down.’ (He’s the age of my son.) He says go upstairs and change the dates to 2006. He sent me back up. I had to walk up 108 stairs. I was so pissed off when I get to the extinguishers, I didn’t do it. But they are still a hazard.”

“When you are not union, they could fire you 1-2-3. It is like a backbone for us. They would defend the security worker.”

“I would go to a union meeting. But my boss—not the building guy—said if he caught me talking to these guys I’d get canned.”

“The union evens the playing field. You can’t come in and indiscriminately fire somebody. There’s a procedure you have to follow. You have a real hearing.”

“If I go to the union rally they said they would fire me.”

Training: More Skills and More Confidence

Union members reported receiving training on a range of topics, from customer service and dealing with the public to anti-terrorism, and some had participated in a relatively new 32BJ-sponsored 40-hour training program. They most often described the training as “valuable,” “professional,” “helpful,” and giving them confidence.

“Bomb threat training, customer service training, security training using monitors. It is helpful.”

“...terrorist training. I took it and it was good.”

“I did 40-hour training. 32BJ did it. Intense. Red Cross training. How to detect a fake ID. I got it through the union.”

“Every year we go back for a license and it keeps us up to date. Make us feel more secure about your job because you would know what to do. More confident.”

“We have annual training. I find it valuable. Helps a lot.”

“Used to be once a year. Now it is 40 hours training. Went down to union building for five days. It is professional—we had a detective teach us.”

“Training courses in the security industry are most important thing. I’ve had terrorist attack and explosive devices—what to recognize and what not to, guidelines in self control—learned it through interacting with people, picking up books on psychology.”

The level of training described by the unionized sector contrasted dramatically with the experiences described by non-unionized workers. Although they were working in similar and often high profile buildings and potential terrorist targets such as television networks and Wall Street financial institutions, they received minimal formal training. Instead they were forced to rely on “learning the ropes” on the job and

common sense. A number portrayed the required 8-hour certification programs as a sham and expressed an eagerness for more training.

IS THERE TRAINING?

"No, there should be. I would be happy to do these classes."

"The first job I had...I didn't get no training. All they did was give me a uniform and say, 'Sit there.'"

DO YOU GET ADEQUATE TRAINING?

"No. Security you just go for 8-hour certification. They'd show you some TV with a picture of person going to blow up a building. That's it."

"...they just handed me the diploma! I wanted to go to the class. I stayed for a while and they came in and said I could go but I wanted to stay and hear more."

"On renewal for the eight hours, they just wrote your name and handed you the diploma and that was that."

"I sat there and a guy telling me this and that. And the next thing you know, 'All right, you pass the course.' Aren't you going to give me a written exam or nothing to see how good I am at it? 'No we don't do all that. Don't worry about it.'"

"No training. There is no training. It's on the job training. You learn the ropes."

You Get What You Pay for: How Wages, Benefits, Job Security and Training Affect Motivation and Job Commitment, Performance and Ultimately Public Safety

The sense among union members that they had a good job with a lot at stake motivated them to do their best not to jeopardize it. But beyond that, these security guards prided themselves on their professionalism derived from training, and they talked about their ability to navigate difficult situations and deal with all kinds of people with confidence. They felt that a lot depended on how well they did their jobs; lives are at stake.

"We as security officers, we are out there. We are the eyes and ears even for the police department. If something goes wrong we are the ones who let them know."

"When you have a good paying job with benefits and job protection, you don't want to put the job in jeopardy. You are going to do the best. It is part of me. I am part of the company. Furthermore, the company is...up for improvement. You could move up. The union gives you that open door."

"You're going to get what you pay for. If you are going to go with a low pay, they are going to see something and turn his back and not report it."

"The union guys are more professional. People lose their lives if we don't do our jobs. They know the guidelines."

"When you are with the union, the work is better. The money. If you don't pay people right, they're not going to work their butts for you. Period."

"If you need high quality security, if you really value your building, you can't expect to hire a guy and pay him \$6 an hour and expect him to put his life on the line for your building. Furthermore, you need people who have an interest in the building because they are well paid, they are secure in terms of their job security, they have benefits, they are motivated. In my building, when I am there, I feel I am a part of the company. I am not exposed. Everything is my concern. I am involved. So that is what you get when you hire someone who is unionized and professional."

Many of the non-union workers openly admitted that low pay, lack of benefits, little training, high turnover, and lack of job security resulted in a demoralized workforce. They described instances where guards arrived at work exhausted from holding down two jobs needed to survive, and would be unwilling to put their own lives at risk in an emergency. Their bottom line: they felt that the city was less safe as a result.

"Lots of guys just feel that they don't pay you enough to push the button. They don't care. There are a lot of people who are like this. It jeopardizes a lot of things, a lot of people. They risk my life."

"We had a saying in security ever since 9/11—you get what you pay for. You walk around this building saying terrorist this and terrorist that, but if you aren't paying me nothing, then I am going to have an attitude like, so what?"

"More training would make the city safer."

"'You get what you pay for' my motto. You want a safe building, pay for it."

"If you are making more money, you are going to do your job better, not just this job but any job."

"Most security guards are working two jobs. Especially if you have a family. They are exhausted."

"If the building managers really invested time and energy doing some research, they would probably make out better with security companies being unionized. They would get a lot more for their money."

IV. Conclusions

When each morning tens of thousands of workers stream into their gleaming midtown Manhattan and downtown office towers, they take it for granted that their desks, papers, and computers will be there, just as they left them the day before. The legions of business people, delivery men, diplomats, celebrities, and tourists going in and out of high profile buildings in Times Square, near the UN, and on Wall Street assume they will be safe riding the elevators and walking the corridors, and that in the event of an emergency, fire extinguishers will operate and informed guards will direct their orderly evacuation. When packages are delivered to the office next door, we assume they have been properly screened. Few of us even stop to think that the man or woman in the uniform standing behind the granite desk, below the \$50,000 abstract painting, beside the \$250 floral arrangement, with responsibility for ensuring our well-being, could be making as little as \$8 or \$10 an hour, without a single day of paid sick leave, no pension, no job protection and no health insurance. Yet our research has shown how often that is the case.

What are the Implications for Building Tenants, Visitors, and the Public at Large?

Protection of people and property has always been a priority for New Yorkers, but in the age of terrorism, these concerns have become paramount. One would expect workers receiving poverty wages, minimal training and no benefits would be stressed by the demands of their jobs and the struggle to support themselves and their families. Our study bears this out. In particular, the lack of job security undermines the ability of workers to enforce building policies with confidence. Low pay and lack of benefits also lead to higher turnover. Many companies were described as moving guards from site to site, further diminishing familiarity with tenants and building procedures. The non-unionized workers primarily learn on the job, although many express a desire for more formal training. In addition, non-unionized security guards report they have no choice but to come into work sick or sleepless from holding two jobs needed to survive. These are hardly optimal conditions for workers who must be alert and ready to spring into action to insure the public safety.

There are other implications for the city's economic and social health. As an occupation that has become increasingly valued and cannot easily be outsourced overseas, the security industry could potentially offer a pool of good jobs to those without a college education. Such jobs would help fill a critical gap in a city like New York that in recent decades has shed so many of its blue collar manufacturing jobs. These industrial jobs once provided the path to a solid working class life, particularly for less educated men of color who today experience high rates of joblessness and unemployment.⁹ Unfortunately, the potential of the security industry to provide substantial numbers of good jobs remains unrealized. But that is not inevitable. The existence of good jobs in the unionized sector demonstrates that it is not only possible, but that it would yield substantial benefits to the buildings that employ security guards as well as to the general public.

⁹ The Community Service Society has issued a number of reports documenting the high rates of joblessness confronting New York City's African American men. See, most recently, Levitan, Mark. *Unemployment and Joblessness in New York City, 2005: Decline in Unemployment Rate Masks Continued Areas of Weakness*. March 2006. <http://www.cssny.org/pdfs/UnemploymentInNYC2005.pdf>.

Appendices

A: Data Sources

This report takes two approaches to understanding working and living conditions typical of New York City's security guards. The first is quantitative and makes extensive use of survey data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics along with the U.S. Census Bureau. The statistics and narrative found in the quantitative section of the report draw upon an industry profile prepared for the Community Service Society by Dr. Curtis Skinner of Pelliparius Consulting. That report, entitled "Security Guards and the Contract Guard Services Industry in New York City," is available from the Community Service Society upon request.

The report's second method of investigation is qualitative. The Community Service Society contracted with Margaret Mark Strategic Insight, an independent consulting firm, to recruit for and conduct a series of focus groups composed of security guards who were currently working in commercial office buildings located south of 59th Street in Manhattan. Potential participants were approached randomly by professional

recruiters who asked if they would be interested in participating in a research study. They were told that they would be compensated for their time. Those guards who expressed an interest were re-screened to insure that the focus group participants would be representative of the demographic make-up of the occupation. As a result, most of the focus group participants were full-time workers, male, and African American, with a smaller representation of Latinos and whites. Two of the five focus groups were composed of members of SEIU Local 32BJ. They were recruited by the consulting firm from a list of buildings identified by 32BJ as union. The other three groups were recruited from a random selection of commercial buildings.

While the results of the focus group research were unusually consistent and clear, the sample is small, and as is generally the case with qualitative studies, should be viewed as providing insights rather than hard figures.

B:

Highlights of Focus Group Findings

In their own words...what 32BJ union members and non-unionized security guards in Manhattan's prime commercial buildings below 59th Street say about their jobs.

32BJ members

ADEQUACY OF THEIR WAGES AND STANDARD OF LIVING

Union members generally describe their pay as good and their lives as comfortable, managing and making ends meet. Though some held second jobs, it was generally seen as more of a positive choice than out of necessity. For example, one man was trying to save up to get married. While they realize there are limits to how much they can earn in this line of work, and many wish they could earn more, they describe a life where they "can't complain" and are economically self-sufficient and solidly working class.

"I am OK, I'm comfortable. I'm happy. One, because I got a reasonable salary that I can survive on. I can provide for my family. I can sleep well at night. Don't have to seek a second job and medical benefits. Those are the two principles—decent salary and medical benefits and the union places a key role in protection to you and your family."

"Well paid—been in it 16 years."

"The money is good."

"The money is decent, not good. You have to work overtime which is like having another job. In this environment, it is decent, not good."

"My salary, I can't complain. But I would want a little more. If you are by yourself it would be hard to pay the bills."

"I manage on my own."

"I am making ends meet."

"Never going to pay \$30 an hour. Going to get 3 to 4% over five years and then the union takes more."

"The security job, you hit the glass ceiling automatically. It would be nice to have some more. But as soon as I can put my degrees to work, I am out of there."

Non-Union

ADEQUACY OF THEIR WAGES AND STANDARD OF LIVING

In contrast, non-unionized workers are much more likely to describe their pay as "lousy," a "dead end" with no raises and barely enough to get by. Some talked about relying on public benefits, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and public housing to survive. But more typically, these workers described themselves as falling between the cracks—not earning enough to pay the basic bills but too much to qualify for food stamps or Medicaid. They described themselves as living "check to check" and struggling to get by and longed to have a little bit extra, just so they could buy their child a Christmas present, eat lunch out for once, or be able to treat themselves to something—even if it was just a bag of chips. Though dissatisfied with their pay, they were thankful to have a job at all and felt they were better off than the alternatives of welfare or "being out on the street holding a paper cup." Though holding steady jobs, their lives were those of the working poor.

"Anything is better than welfare. I would do anything—mop floors, clean toilets."

"Some pay lousy and are late with the money or the pay isn't right. Tell you, you have to wait 'til the next pay cycle. I was working two jobs for months. I need more than \$8.75 an hour."

"I worked for someone else and they never gave me a one cent raise. \$8 an hour. Now I get \$13 with a dollar raise every year."

"The custodial staff always does better. The security company is getting money from the building but not paying us so you can't blame the building."

"My building called my security company to give me a raise but when they moved me, no raise."

"Just getting by. With the way they are raising fares, rent, food—where is our raise?"

"It is difficult. It is hard to manage. Everything is going up."

32BJ members

"The non-union guys are probably on public assistance. How can they support a family?"

"I need more money so I work two jobs. I have that choice in the union."

"Many have a second jobs...elevator operator, financial planning, night club protecting clients, cash drops."

"The non-union guys are trying to get by and put food on the table."

"Not enough money."

"We are just trying to make ends meet and take one day at a time."

"It is a struggle because I pay child support. Any little money I have for the weekends with my son. My parents help me out. I am doing all right. I am struggling but."

"I am surviving. I am not complaining. It could be more. "

Non-Union

"I am blessed that I am not on public assistance, but I am looking for a company for more money."

"Living check to check."

"By the time the check comes in, it is already gone."

"This Christmas that was passed, I couldn't get nothing for my kid. Nothing. It hurts real bad because he'll say, 'You have a job.'"

"Kids can be real mean...oh your daddy's poor. You don't want your kid to be embarrassed. You just want to give them a little something."

"I would much rather be working and making a little money than be out on the street asking for money. It is a lot easier doing it like this than go around with a paper cup."

"Everybody needs to have more money. Even though I live in the projects I am blessed to be able pay the rent and have money to pay the bills."

"We are content compared to where you've been. Unemployment is not enough money. Compared to that I'll take it."

"The companies can be greedy. They get \$20.50 from the building but they can't give you a \$1 raise!"

"The company I am with now is out to rob you."

"This industry is going to get cheap labor and minorities are cheap labor."

"It isn't prejudice; it's that people are hungry."

"There are three guys sitting outside ready to take the job."

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE PAY?

"Lousy."

"Terrible."

"

Lousy."

"My wife works and we help each other out. New York is expensive. If I was by myself I couldn't make ends meet."

"

I should get paid more but I am OK."

"They are going to take advantage of you—the building. They pressure the firm."

Non-Union

"Sometimes Medicaid turns you down and they give you a problem. You make too much. So I had to get another job to help me out."

"I had to get a Medicaid card. I got it because I am a parent."

"First they tell me I am making too much money! I went to HR and they told me I could get food stamps but no, I still make too much."

"Food stamps helped. It's not much but it helps."

"I get some Medicaid."

"They tell me I make too much. Without any children you don't get anything back in taxes."

"Medicaid wouldn't accept you because we make too much. They would take my daughter."

"Food stamps. We can't get them. They say I make too much."

"It is hard to manage with the money and child support. My child support comes right off the top. If you can't get to work or have a roof over you head, that's what you need."

"You need a job and a roof over your head. Poverty is \$12,000—working poor. But you make too much money. But I have to buy clothes, food, shoes. Kids are growing. \$12,000 ain't nothing."

IS THERE ANY FUTURE IN SECURITY?

"There is nothing there for us."

"Moving up to a FSD is hard and takes a long time. It is a slight upgrade."

"It is a dead end job. A bounce back job. Toll collector was better. I had benefits."

"I am ready to leave. I bounce from job to job. They don't have benefits. You are going nowhere."

IF YOU GOT AN INCREASE, WHAT WOULD CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE...

"I would smile for real."

Non-Union

"I would be able to get the things I want. Like at Christmas. I couldn't get anything. It hurts real bad. The child deserves it. It's happened to me lots of times. There is so much I would try to do. I could live a little better. I could eat lunch in midtown Manhattan. No more bag lunch."

"Not bringing lunch from home. Having something in my pocket feels good."

"Save more. I'd force myself to do it."

"I don't have any money left over for me."

"Must always have money to pay yourself even if it is 50 cents for a bag of chips. Pay yourself."

"Nothing for me. I have older kids."

"You want to have a little something for your kids so they don't get embarrassed."

ON YOUR CURRENT WAGES, CAN YOU GET BY...

"I get by pretty good, it's all right for what I do. I sit all day and they have to stand."

"I can't manage. My husband works, thank god. He has health care."

"I manage all right. I don't get everything I want. But my company is all right."

"My father helps me. He covers all the bills. I am going to school so this time next year, I hope to be doing something else."

"I work two jobs—day and night. In security. I got to make a certain amount of money."

32BJ members

HEALTH INSURANCE, SICK LEAVE, PENSION, AND JOB SECURITY

"What is good about the union is the health insurance."

"It is good to be union. They have everything you need. If you have to go to the doctor. Health benefits. Protection for your family, retirement, 401K. When you do 10 years, when the time comes and you are of age, you get at least a half a pension. You need a security blanket that the union is providing you. They get you a good rate. I lost the union for about three years. I was scared crap. They wanted to pay me less. I had no security blanket. What am I going to say to my wife, my family, my landlord?"

"We get sick days, vacation, not fired for no reason. 32BJ. They have school for improving. They have opportunities. You are not stuck. You can go into maintenance, for example."

"Good but it was better before. The last contract is not as good. The co-pay has gone up."

"I feel I have good coverage."

"Some non-union workers don't get any health benefits. But we get sick pay and health insurance."

"Some guys just cover for vacations. They have no health care. They struggle to get by."

"Getting fair deal on vacation."

"Job protection. You have a right to a hearing."

"In security business, you have seniority in the building; the union will respect that."

Non-Union

HEALTH INSURANCE, SICK LEAVE, PENSION, AND JOB SECURITY

Some non-unionized guards were offered health benefits, but it was the exception rather than the rule and dependent on the building where they worked. Even if offered benefits, most said that paying their share of the premium would take such a large chunk out of their take home pay that they could not afford to do it. As a result, they described themselves as going without health insurance and just "praying" they would be all right, not going to the doctor, relying on the city's health department, or resorting to going to a hospital and being saddled with a large debt.

"I do care about the union because I would do better. Especially for my child. I don't go to the doctor. I can't afford it. The Medicaid is for my boy."

"Gotta go to work even if I'm sick."

"Don't know what I get. I am waiting for the benefit package. I manage because I have a good woman in my life. I use the Department of Health."

"I used to have union benefits but I don't now. My new company said if you want medical benefits you will have to pay x dollars a month. You wind up paying half of your paycheck a month to get benefits but I haven't done that yet. I just pray and I hope I'm all right. I go to an emergency medical service. I have a nurse who looks at me once every six months. Until I get my benefits again."

"You don't work, you don't get paid."

"I'm the head of household so I have to go. I need the money. I work seven days a week. You have no choice."

"I didn't get maternity leave."

"I don't have any benefits. If I call in sick I don't get paid."

"I got sick and I went to the hospital and they charged me \$1,000 so I have to go work to pay that off. I do it over time. I owe the hospital \$1,000 which will take me about a year. I have to pay it. I have to pay the cell phone bill first."

32BJ members

TRAINING AND SAFETY

"We get more and better training."

"Promotion for terrorist training. I took it and it was good."

"Bomb threat training, customer service training, security training using monitors. It is helpful."

"I did 40 hour training. 32BJ did it. Intense. Red Cross training. How to detect a fake ID. I got it through the union."

"I am inquiring about the 40 hours. Any little thing that can help us know or handle an emergency in a better way or professional manner because we are the ones on the front lines."

"Feels good being trained. I can help out others. And safeguard property."

"CPR, fire guard and self defense."

"Every year we go back for a license and it keeps us up to date. Make us feel more secure about your job because you would know what to do. More confident."

"Several kinds of training. How to treat people when they come into the building. Very interesting."

"We have annual training. I find it valuable. Helps a lot."

"We have on site tests with fire department. On site and written. I have been waiting for training that is coming up."

"Used to be once a year. Now it is 40 hours training. Went down to union building for five days. It is professional—we had a detective teach us."

"Customer service, how you should appear to the public."

"Training courses in the security industry are most important thing. I've had terrorist attack and explosive devices—what to recognize and what not to, guidelines in self control—learned it through interacting with people, picking up books on psychology."

"We get annual training—anti-terrorist training. Sat in a room and watch slides. The supervisors said nothing. We just wrote down what we saw on the slides."

Non-Union

TRAINING AND SAFETY

IS THERE TRAINING?

"No, there should be. I would be happy to do these classes."

"The first job I had...I didn't get no training. All they did was give me a uniform and say, 'Sit there.'"

DO YOU GET ADEQUATE TRAINING?

"No. Security you just go for eight hour certification. They'd show you some TV with a picture of person going to blow up a building. That's it."

"Security is about common sense. But the police teach them to make an arrest, they teach them discipline, how to act in certain situations. In security we have to decide it on our own."

"Training is when you are on the job. It would be good to have but then again, you learn on the job."

"...they just handed me the diploma! I wanted to go to the class. I stayed for a while and they came in and said I could go but I wanted to stay and hear more."

"On renewal for the eight hours, they just wrote your name and handed you the diploma and that was that."

"I sat there and a guy telling me this and that. And the next thing you know, 'All right, you pass the course.' Aren't you going to give me a written exam or nothing to see how good I am at it? 'No we don't do all that. Don't worry about it.'"

"No training. There is no training. It's on the job training. You learn the ropes. They are supposed to give you (inaudible) training but they haven't."

"Varies with the site. The training comes from the site, not from the security company. The company gives you the bare minimum to put you on a site."

"Some companies give you training. But most just learn on the job."

"Each building is really different. I go to classes—terrorism classes."

"They give me training classes. Our company has eight hour training right in the office."

32BJ members

IMPLICATIONS OF PAY AND TRAINING ON COMMITMENT TO JOB, MOTIVATION, AND ULTIMATELY JOB PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY

"When you are with the union, the work is better. The money. If you don't pay people right, they're not going to work their butts for you. Period."

"When you have a good paying job with benefits and job protection, you don't want to put the job in jeopardy. You are going to do the best. It is part of me. I am part of the company. Furthermore, the company is a company up for improvement. You could move up. The union gives you that open door."

"If you need high quality security, if you really value your building, you can't expect to hire a guy and pay him \$6 an hour and expect him to put his life on the line for your building. Furthermore, you need people who have an interest in the building because they are well paid, they are secure in terms their job security, they have benefits, they are motivated. In my building, when I am there, I feel I am a part of the company. I am not exposed. Everything is my concern. I am involved. So that is what you get when you hire someone who is unionized and professional."

"The union guys are more professional. People lose their lives if we don't do our jobs. They know the guidelines."

"Dealing with people, you have to adjust to each and every one. Can't approach them the same way. I judge a person as they are approaching me and determine what my response is to them. We don't know what walk of life they come from. They could be wearing a suit; they might have had a bad day and, unfortunately, they unload on security so the main thing is you try to analyze them for a tenth of a second. Try to be as polite as possible and at the same time enforcing security policy to accommodate them and also protect the tenants."

"You feel that there is a level of someone caring about you so you do your job with more vigor. Because of the protection, you enjoy doing more. You don't have the fear."

"We as security officers, we are out there. We are the eyes and ears even for the police department. If something goes wrong we are the ones who let them know."

"In the long run, you have more educational background coming from the union. They go to workshops and they feel more part of the industry than they ever have."

Non-Union

HOW LOW PAY AND LITTLE TRAINING UNDERMINE JOB PERFORMANCE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

"More training would make the city safer".

"When you go to work for eight hours and you have to be careful because you are not being paid to get jumped or get shot at because you try to be a super hero."

"The companies are going to give you the minimum of what the building needs. All my training came from the site. The building realizes that since 9/11, they need higher quality personnel. I think there are a lot of people who are just in it for the money. If they smelled smoke they would get their coats and abandon ship. They wouldn't get off their chair to push the button. You have to have pride in your work."

"Lots of guys just feel that they don't pay you enough to push the button. They don't care. There are a lot of people who are like this. It jeopardizes a lot of things, a lot of people. They risk my life."

"'You get what you pay for' my motto. You want a safe building, pay for it."

"We had a saying in security ever since 9/11—you get what you pay for. You walk around this building saying terrorist this and terrorist that, but if you aren't paying me nothing, then I am going to have an attitude like, so what?"

"We have a perception of safety. And realistically do I feel safe? No."

"If the building managers really invested time and energy doing some research they would probably make out better with security companies being unionized. They would get a lot more for their money. Because they [the union] would insure they don't have lazy people not trained or anything. The union is not going to let that happen because it puts them in a negative light. The turnover would not be nearly as great. Now you're training people left and right."

"Once you get decent wages, then you don't mind going to work."

32BJ members

"Well-trained security officers for this environment. Public relations. When we wear a uniform and we are representing the building, it affects everyone in the structure. We are representing management. I am guaranteeing them that they are well trained in the field, to cover that area in public relations, access control. How to handle a crisis or verbal abuse."

"You're going to get what you pay for. If you are going to go with a low pay, they are going to see something and turn his back and not report it. Security officers are trained to seek, to report and to protect the tenants while they are at work."

"Challenging because when you are dealing with the public, different characters, you need patience. Some people are nice to deal with some are difficult. You have to know how to be flexible. We make fun that if someone needs people for the police force, they should call a security guard seeing as we have to operate in the same kind of environment but with less authority. That's where the word flexibility comes in. It takes more out of you because the buck stops at you because management is expecting and paying you to handle the situation."

"I have angry people and disrespectful people but you have to know how to handle it. You can't just jump and go out there without knowing to get help, from the building manager. I know how to do this because I've been there eight or nine years. I speak to them with respect."

"You have to be as polite and professional as possible because you are judged on how you express yourself, how you carry yourself even wearing a uniform."

Non-Union

"I am a fire guard. My job is to do what the FSD asks me to do. Last week I go to work and the FSD cuts out for four hours. Leave it to me to sniff out a slimy guy. He comes back four hours later. Asks me to check some the fire extinguishers. That's my job to do what he says so I go check the fire extinguishers. I fill a report out and on my report that five were a year expired which means that they weren't checked twice in one year. So this is what he says, 'Sit down.' (He's the age of my son.) He says go upstairs and change the dates to 2006. He sent me back up. I had to walk up 108 stairs. I was so pissed off when I get to the extinguishers, I didn't do it. But they are still a hazard."

"If you are making more money, you are going to do your job better, not just this job but any job."

"Most security guards are working two jobs. Especially if you have a family. They are exhausted."

"It is wear and tear on you body, not being as sharp if something does happen."

"Now you're falling asleep and not doing what you are paid to do. You still have to survive. You still got to make a living. You just don't have a choice."

"After all, we are protecting the building. We are protecting property and we are protecting people. What kind of respect are you giving us that you don't want to give us the right money?"

I HEAR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE IN THE UNION HAVE BETTER PAY, BETTER BENEFITS...WHAT WOULD CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE?

"I wouldn't need two jobs. I would stay with the security job."

"I could go to work feeling better about my job. It's a drag now. Same thing. Better incentive. Gives you a better incentive to do your job. You take care better of yourself and you get more done. You feel better about myself. I could buy myself some new clothes. I would look better and then I would feel better."

"I would try to work part time to stay home more with my daughter."

32BJ members

ON THE DIFFERENCE A UNION MAKES

"If you work for the building or if you are in the union, you are in much better shape."

"The union saves a lot of us but unfortunately, that's what makes the discrepancies between all security officers. We all want the same thing—the \$20 an hour that the union gives us but then you have the greedy security companies who get the young guys and give \$6 to one, \$7 to another, so you have all these different levels and that's where your resentment comes in."

"When Guardian said they didn't want union member, I was out in the cold. I was on the loading dock. I had to work. It was six months of hell for me. I felt degraded."

"But I worked in an environment that was non-union and there was no protection. If people don't like you they pushed you around and people get abused."

"I would tell someone to look for a union job. Get a security company that is unionized and you stand a chance. Without that for some reason that there is something they don't like about you. I have lost guards because the property manager didn't like how they answered them."

"You get the raise and insurance for my family. Have a holiday—if you don't work you don't get paid, but now (with the union) you get paid. Benefits. I can go to the doctor. Now if something happens, and now the building manager can't just say I don't want to see you in my building anymore. I can go to the union and they can help me, give me job protection."

"\$6 an hour they are not going to do anything except fall asleep."

Non-Union

"Alert, responsibility, deter. Try to avoid bad things from happening. If you are not alert you're a dead man. You have to watch everything. I try to take it in stride. I work in a high risk building in Times Square. I take a negative and turn it into a positive—smile, dress nice, get to know everyone's name. And as soon as you know they stop and give you a conversation. As long as you do your job to the letter and are courteous, the bosses are not going to say anything to you. You just do your job."

"We are the line of defense."

"A lot of building management don't have your back. They tell you to do one thing and as soon as something hits the fan, they are going to leave you out by yourself. Leave you on the out."

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NON-UNION AND UNION WORKERS "LIKE LABORERS AND SHIRT AND TIE"

Although the non-unionized security guards were keenly aware of the gains unionization could bring—from higher pay, to health benefits, paid holidays and especially, job security—they reported being intimidated at work. Several feared that if they were seen talking to union representatives they would be fired on the spot.

"Union workers are better off than non-unions. More health benefits, better care, sick days. Better doctors, better quality time, pension."

"Only benefit that the union has, is if you find yourself in a situation where you might lose your job due to something that might not have been your fault, you may not have been in the wrong, the union will investigate and make sure that they just don't kick you out and it is possible that you can keep your job."

"The one that has the 32BJ connected to it. It does exist and it is the best union. If you lose your job they will even try to find a new job."

"I have heard people talking about it. I knew some people. I was afraid to get fired if I showed an interest."

"They wouldn't really fire you unless you come to work and try to enlighten your co-workers."

"The union would be a beautiful thing. Health benefits, a little more pay—I would put the money in my house."

"If you aren't unionized, what are you going to do? The union would make a difference. You would have someone to speak for you."

32BJ members

"I hope they unionize everyone. We need better salary, training, job security. We all work within the same field. Need to come to each other's aid. Those of us at a better wage level. We want everyone to come up to our level so that we are protected. We don't want to be at two levels."

Non-Union

"The benefits are sick days, better benefits, can't just fire you. Paid holidays."

"The union guys do good—make more money."

"A lot of security companies are fighting against the union."

"We would have someone backing us. They couldn't just fire for improbable cause. With a union, I am an individual, not just another number."

"When you are not union, they could fire you 1-2-3. It is like a backbone for us. They would defend the security worker."

"Union people get health care. We get benefits, but it depends on the site."

"I would go to a union meeting. But my boss—not the building guy—said if he caught me talking to these guys I'd get canned."

"Wouldn't let union guy in the building."

"The union evens the playing field. You can't come in and indiscriminately fire somebody. There's a procedure you have to follow. You have a real hearing."

"Benefits. You have medical benefits. You would have vacation, would be more secure. In order to keep my job, I have to go along with whatever if they want to change my schedule. The workers never get together, they are afraid to lose their job. Always one person close to the boss. One who is scared. If I go to the union rally they said they would fire me."

"It isn't just the money, it's other things. Like when you get sick. It is a combination, money and benefits, then we can feel that we have a normal job like everybody else who has benefits. I said, Damn, what, are we the only ones who don't have benefits? You'd feel normal like everybody else and feel better about yourself."

ARE SOME SECURITY FIRMS BETTER TO WORK FOR THAN OTHERS?

"The best ones are the ones that have the union. Unions are the best. They can't really just kick you out automatically like that. If you don't have a union they can really stick it to you. The respect level when you have no union you really don't have nobody to support you so they do whatever they want to you—they cut your hours or send you home."

32BJ members

LACK OF RESPECT

Both unionized and non-unionized workers described what they saw as a lack of respect for security guards, which they ascribed to the position itself.

"A security officer is invisible. It doesn't matter who the person is who is doing the abuse. Trust me. I have been abused by black, Latino, Asian. It doesn't matter. It's the position that has the problem. You are nobody. Who are you to talk to me? You are a security officer."

"The minute you say security, you are a 'toy cop' I could say it is race, but it is not. It is the position."

"People always look at security as a soldier in the corner but we're the ones who actually make sure that you're safe. That's the way they look at security, as just as underpaid, not being a full policeman."

"I think people look down on security guys. Because they feel that security doesn't have the big degrees because if you did, you wouldn't be in security."

"We are licensed and a lot of people who can't get it. I have people at the (name of building) who come from different countries and states who respect us more than Americans do here in this country. Because in their countries that have a good understanding of what we do. American viewpoint is yeah, there's a security guard but when there is a bomb in the building, we're their best friends. I have people who come in and walk right on by us, people from Texas, New Jersey, here in New York, they walk right on by. Do they not see the procedures? In this day and age, to walk into a building and completely go past security and then when you confront them they are amazed and shocked."

"They don't consider us a big deal, just a guy behind a desk. Not like an officer. And when we confront them they are like, why are you asking me questions? But that is our job."

Non-Union

"Especially when it comes to the pay and the benefits. They get paid days off, they get holidays where a non-union it is up to them. I get paid holidays not because of my company but because of the building I work at."

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UNION AND NON-UNION?

"It is like laborers and shirt and tie. The union is shirt and tie. They get more respect. They get more pay, more benefits. The non-union will kick you out anytime. Union pays 12.50 and non-union 8."

LACK OF RESPECT

"A lot of people underestimate our jobs and talk down to security people. Not the tenants but the visitors. Whenever we follow the procedure they get upset. Why are you checking me?"

"Tedious, stressful and thankless. You have to go through everything with a fine tooth comb. When something goes down, if it is a good thing, it is you doing your job, but if it is a bad thing, they blame it on security so you don't really get a lot of thanks. They don't really notice you unless until there is an emergency. This is a whole different dynamic on how they look at you. Before that it is pretty much attitude. I get attitude from the tenants. It is kind of stressful. They say good morning to you because of the uniform. But they really don't notice you. Been in security seven years. I was at hotels where you are really behind the scenes and you don't interact with people. The majority of people look down on you."

"You call your name—'toy cop.'"

"Stressful, aggravated. We are just dog food."

"A lot of times in the security business, people don't respect you and they just look at you like a guard. It could be anybody, the management, the employees, the tenant, people coming into the building. A lot of times you get looked down on."

"I think that for security especially in these times and days with the terrorism and all the things that have happened these last few years, you would think that we would get more respect, more pay, more benefits because we are protecting other people without guns. We get the shaft all the time. In this business that is what it is about unless you get in management it is a little better but that isn't that much better."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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