

My name is John Coli, Jr. and I am the Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 727. Local 727 represents approximately 1,193 paratransit drivers in the Chicagoland area, including those who work at various First Transit locations, and we negotiate the collective bargaining agreements that cover these employees.

We are currently negotiating with First Transit for their paratransit work in Chicago. During these negotiations, First Transit has continuously been out of line with substandard proposals and regressive bargaining, but the most disgusting has been their refusal to match wages to what their employees make at their DuPage location. These members have been substantially underpaid for the last several years and have been told repeatedly by their employer to hold on until the next labor contract because First Transit would reward them for their work.

However, once we got to the table, First Transit has insisted that it has no intention of matching what others pay for the same work...that they simply do not care what others pay. The Union bargaining committee pointed out that they have asked multiple times what their competitors pay in wages when they are bidding against them for Pace work, but they simply stated that those were different circumstances. Clearly, the industry standard matters when they are looking to take work from other operators but not when it comes to treating their own people fairly.

The simple fact is that First Transit Chicago wants to pay employees who work for the same company, in the same industry, and who do the same job, significantly less in wages. What makes even less sense is that workers from the First Transit Chicago division tend to live in Chicago, where the cost of living is considerably higher than outlying suburbs like those in DuPage County.

Representatives of First Transit outright said during negotiations covering DuPage work that the workers in their Chicago division faced more challenges in their day-to-day work.

If the work is harder and the cost of living is higher, one would think you should at least match, if not exceed, the compensation. The only difference the employees, our members, see is a difference in demographics. It is hard not to notice that the vast majority of the hardworking men and women who do the Chicago work are Black whereas the majority of those servicing DuPage are White.

It should be noted that \$21 dollars an hour is not only that the starting wage at First Transit DuPage, but it is the industry standard and is commensurate with starting wages at First Transit competitors such as MV Transportation and National Express/CDT - companies that also have contracts with PACE.

We ask this Board to hear us, review the information we are providing, ask hard questions of First Transit and, finally, demand that First Transit immediately stop the practice of unequal pay for equal work and compensate these essential workers for the previous wage discrepancy.