

Testimony
by
Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1179
to
MTA Board, Monday, June 21, 2021

I am Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1179. All transit workers served on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19. This includes the members of ATU Local 1179 in Queens, Local 726 in Staten Island, Local 1056 also in Queens and Local 1181 in Brooklyn.

Local 1179 members operate and maintain MTA Bus routes serving Queens with some routes extending into Brooklyn and Manhattan.

No sugarcoating or playing politics or political correctness here. What our membership sees is that the MTA treats us as anything but heroes. The MTA already settled a contract including new wages for the workers represented by TWU Local 100. ATU members across the five boroughs are working under an expired contract that the MTA REFUSES to negotiate in good faith. By doing this the MTA has created two classes of workers paid differently to perform the same work. The MTA refusal to settle creates a gross inequity among its workforces.

Our members were classified as essential employees and worked to make sure other essential workers, including doctors, nurses, police, grocery store clerks and others, can get to their jobs and return home to their families. Our members showed up to work despite real threats to their health and safety of a high increased risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

This exposure has not been without consequences. In New York, ATU Locals have lost 34 of their brothers and sisters to COVID-19; these public servants put their lives on the line as essential workers during this crisis. And our members perform their jobs in an exemplary manner despite the MTA treating them as second-class workers without the same compensation afforded to our brothers and sisters at Local 100.

MTA is refusing to honor pattern bargaining for a new contract or even discuss hazard pay. ATU workers deserve a contract for the same work as those unions with whom the MTA has already settled. Settling our contracts collectively involves very little impact on the MTA overall operating budget.

These hardworking men and women came to work and ensured that other essential workers could get to where they needed to go. Their dedication and hard work must be recognized and never marginalized.

MTA asked the ATU to advocate on their behalf for economic relief. Through ATU International, we strongly supported the increasing of operating aid for public transportation in the federal Coronavirus relief fund. This ensured that the MTA received adequate funding so it can honor their contractual obligations. ATU delivered.

Quoting our International President John Costa, “They call us heroes, but at the bargaining table they expect us to take zeroes. We deserve equal pay for equal work.”

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