

Adam Yalowitz  
ayalowitz@unitehere.org  
202-826-4086

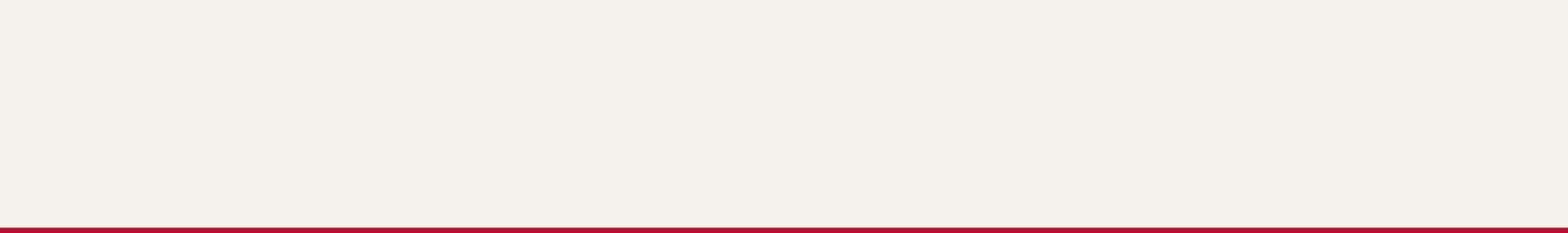


## Left Behind at the D.C. Airports

*"I thought working here would pay more than working at the market, but I have to work two jobs at the airport. The airport charges more than on the street, but they don't pay people any more."*

—**TESFAYE DANSE**, Utility Worker at Reagan National Airport





## At D.C.'s two government-owned airports, Dulles and Reagan National,

the food and retail concessions program generate important revenue for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA), the body that oversees both airports. MWAA, which gets a cut of all concessions sales, has seen revenue from the concessions program increase dramatically in recent years. The food and retail outlets at both airports, primarily staffed by Ethiopian immigrants, are expected to generate an estimated \$144,000 on a daily basis for the airports authority this year.<sup>1</sup> But despite the success of the airports' concessions program, the food and retail workers at the D.C. airports have been left behind.

## At D.C.'s airports, the government makes more money per hour from terminal concessions workers than the workers make themselves

At Dulles, the estimated average wage for retail and food service workers is just \$9.74 per hour.<sup>2</sup> For every hour worked by a concessions employee at Dulles, the airport authority makes an estimated \$20.28 at Dulles and \$17.17 at Reagan National.<sup>3</sup>



## Revenue from airport concessions is growing, but wages and working conditions are stagnant

In 2016, the airport authority expects to receive an estimated \$52.4 million in revenue from the food and retail outlets at Reagan and Dulles combined. This represents a 30 percent increase in total revenue from food and retail concessions for the airports authority since 2014, and an over 50 percent increase since 2012.<sup>4</sup>





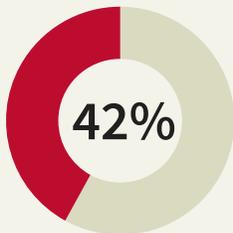
*“We all know the airport makes money. But I only make \$9.50 an hour. I can’t afford rent. I could not send money back home to help my mother before she passed away. What’s happening to our community is really sad. I did not expect jobs at the airport would be like this.”*

—**KASAHUN BELAHU**, Utility Worker at Reagan National Airport

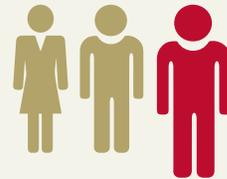
Meanwhile, forty-two percent of food and retail workers at Dulles have never received a raise while working at the airport.

## A grim reality for airport workers in our nation’s capital

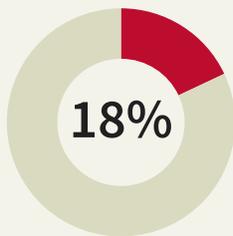
### Among surveyed workers at Dulles:



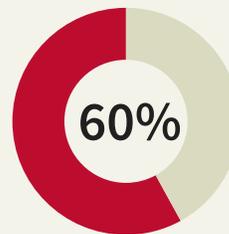
42% have never received a raise while working at the airport.



1 in 3 reported working two jobs at the airport.



18% Almost 1 in 5 workers, 18 percent, reported experiencing hunger because they didn’t have enough money for food while working at the airport



60% do not receive healthcare from their employer



1 in 6 reported that they have experienced discrimination at their current job.

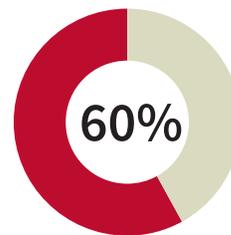
1 in 7 reported having been homeless while working at the airport

*“The D.C. Airports are an important source of employment for Ethiopians in the region. But instead of helping our community move ahead, the low wages and poor conditions at the airports are keeping our community behind”*

—**PRIEST WALELIGN KETSELA**, at Debre Mehret Saint Michael Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Washington, D.C.

## **D.C. airports are one of the largest employers of Ethiopians in the country**

Sixty percent of the retail and food workers at the D.C. airports are Ethiopians, making the D.C. airports one of the biggest employers of Ethiopians in the country.<sup>6</sup> The poor working conditions at Reagan National and Dulles have an outsized impact on the D.C. area’s Ethiopian community.



Sixty percent of the retail and food workers at the D.C. airports are Ethiopians.

## **Food workers at the Federal Aviation Administration D.C.’s headquarters average almost \$5 per hour more than D.C. airport food workers**

Unlike at D.C.’s government-owned airports, in other government-owned facilities throughout the Washington, D.C. area, service workers are treated fairly. The Service Contract Act sets minimum wage and benefit standards for workers on contracts that primarily service the federal government.<sup>7</sup>

Workers in the food operations at the FAA’s headquarters in D.C. average \$14.54 per hour, almost \$5 per hour more than food workers at Dulles.<sup>8</sup> This statistic begs the question: why are D.C.’s airport workers—who also work in a government-owned facility—paid so much less?

## **Airport workers across the country are winning better deals with UNITE HERE**

Conditions for workers at the airports serving the nation’s capital lag far behind thousands of airport food and retail workers in other U.S. airports. At 62 airports across the country, 35,000 airport food and retail workers have won raises and affordable health insurance by organizing with UNITE HERE.

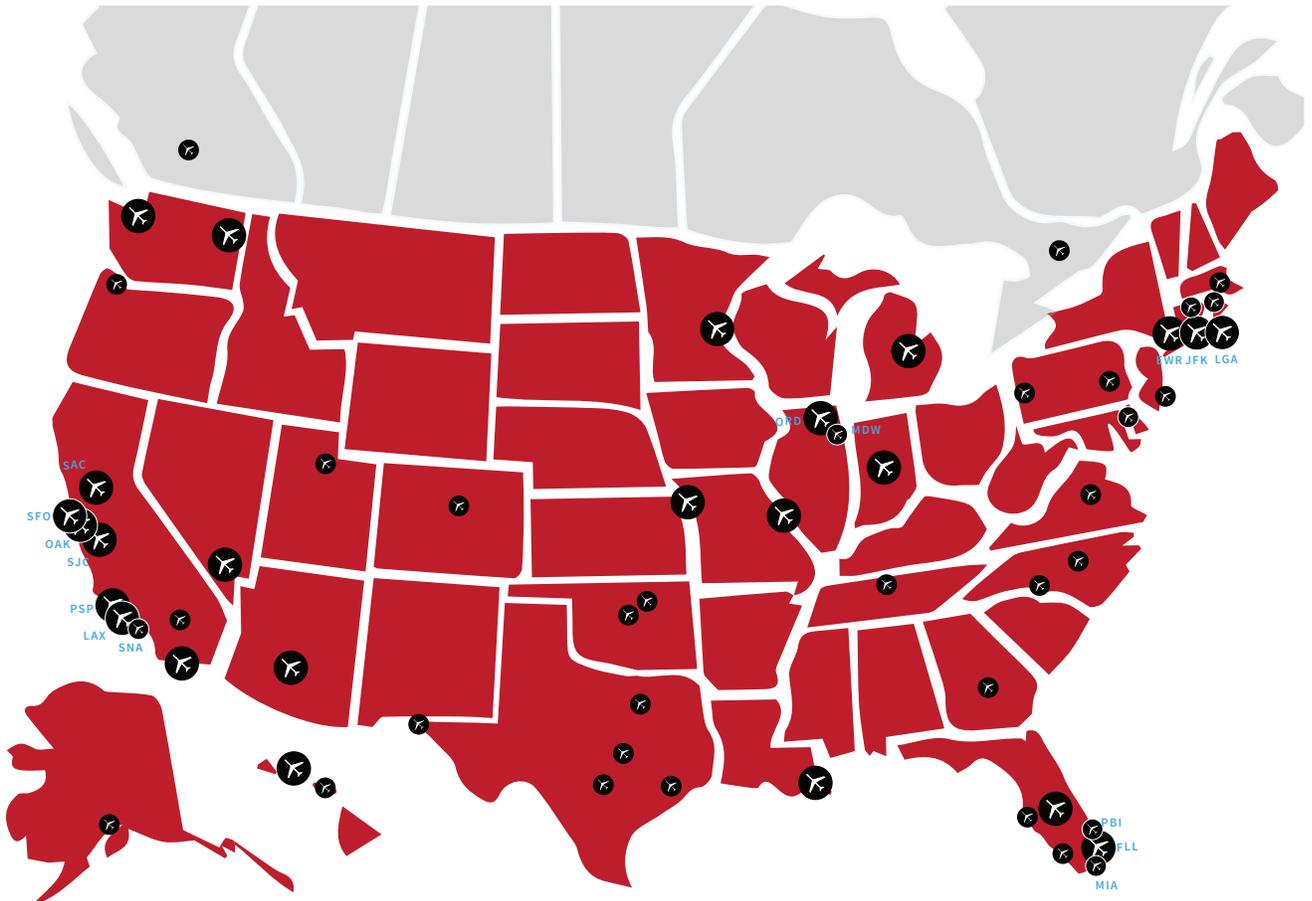


*“This was my first job, and I know that I receive pay and benefits that will allow me to stay here for years to come. It really brightens my day to meet new passengers.”*

—**DOMINIQUE HALL**, Barista at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

At the Philadelphia International Airport, union airport food and retail workers will earn minimum wages of between \$12.74 and \$13.74 by April 2018, and have protections to ensure full-time work. At Chicago Midway International Airport, many union retail workers pay nothing out-of-pocket for individual health insurance. And at Las Vegas McCarran International Airport, workers have guaranteed shifts and set advance notice for schedule changes.

**35,000 airport food and retail workers have won raises and affordable health insurance by organizing with UNITE HERE**



## Endnotes

- 1 [http://www.mwaa.com/sites/default/files/0\\_-\\_budget\\_2016\\_board\\_final\\_website.pdf](http://www.mwaa.com/sites/default/files/0_-_budget_2016_board_final_website.pdf)
- 2 According to a survey conducted by UNITE HERE of 141 out of approximately 800 concessions employees at Dulles during April and May 2015
- 3 Reagan National and Dulles employee estimates based on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and Montgomery County, Maryland Park and Planning's square feet per employee ratios. Square footage data from ARNfact-book.com. Assuming full-time, year-round employment.
- 4 [http://www.mwaa.com/sites/default/files/0\\_-\\_budget\\_2016\\_board\\_final\\_website.pdf](http://www.mwaa.com/sites/default/files/0_-_budget_2016_board_final_website.pdf)
- 5 [http://www.metwashairports.com/sites/default/files/archive/mwaa.com/file/2014\\_Comprehensive\\_Annual\\_Financial\\_Report\\_%28CAFR%29.pdf](http://www.metwashairports.com/sites/default/files/archive/mwaa.com/file/2014_Comprehensive_Annual_Financial_Report_%28CAFR%29.pdf)
- 6 See attached Summary of Survey Data and Excel Spreadsheet of Survey Responses
- 7 <http://www.dol.gov/whd/govcontracts/sca.htm>
- 8 Analysis of wage rates at Sodexo FAA Cafeteria.

---

**UNITE HERE Local 23**  
**1775 K St., NW, Suite 620**  
**Washington, DC 20006**  
**ayalowitz@unitehere.org • 202-826-4086**