

UNITEHERE! LOCAL 450



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June 22, 2021



To Commissioners of the Cook County Board

RE: Agenda File #21-3411

Dear Commissioner;

On behalf of the membership of UNITE-HERE Local 450, and in the interests of assuring the fair treatment of unionized workers and inmates in the Cook County Department of Corrections, we assert our opposition to the proposed contract with Trinity Services Group, Inc. ("Trinity") which is before you at the June 24 meeting of the Board. This contract is for the management of Food Services at the Cook County Jail; agenda File #21-3411.

UNITE-HERE is the bargaining unit under the County's current Food Services Management contract, which was assigned by Summit Food Services LLC to CBM Premier Management, LLC ("CBM Premier"). During its relationship with UNITE-HERE, which includes three (3) seamlessly negotiated successive contracts, CBM Premier has fostered a sound climate of labor relations and respect for unionized labor. Our current collective bargaining agreement with CBM Premier respects all County, State and National labor law, provides living wages for our members and fosters union peace. During the eight plus years of our relationship we have had only a handful of grievances with the employer, all of which were resolved amicably at the local level. We could not ask for better treatment from an employer.

Trinity, on the other hand, does not have a constructive track record of recognizing the value and importance of a unionized work force. Trinity Services Group has been the object of NLRB action for Unfair Labor Practices and, in the State of California, for the violation of state labor laws. Until last year, Trinity's subsidiary, Keefe Group ("Keefe"), held the contract with Cook County Jail for Commissary Services. During the term of that contract, none of Keefe's employees at the jail were unionized.

The moment CBM Premier assumed responsibility for the Commissary contract, all Keefe's non-management workforce became unionized as part of UNITE-HERE'S bargaining unit. CBM's effort in this regard was voluntary, accomplished without an election and resulted from little more than a brief discussion with us. These workers either retained their existing wages or had wage increases and became eligible for health and welfare benefits at no cost to them, as provided for in our bargaining agreement. In the face of this stark contrast in attitude and treatment, it is difficult for us to understand why the County would now act to contract with a company that lacks a commitment to the benefits of a unionized workforce.

Underscoring our concerns is the matter of the welfare and safety of the detainees in the custody of Cook County Jail. The contracted party for Food Service Management is responsible for food safety and sanitation and the timely delivery of nutritionally sound meals. UNITE-HERE, through its general involvement in the local community and its specific involvement in the Cook County jail program, holds these obligations in the highest regard. Trinity has exhibited, at best, a checkered history when it comes to the safety and well-being of inmates for which it is responsible.

Trinity was fined more than \$2 million for various health, sanitation and meal delay violations in the brief time they held a contract with the State of Michigan Department of Corrections. Inmates at four correctional facilities in Michigan staged hunger strike protests in response to "substandard" food served by Trinity. In 2018, the State of Michigan cited staffing vacancies, turnover, compliance with performance expectations and a request by Trinity for additional funding as the primary reasons for ending its contract with Trinity and returning to in-house service.

In 2016, a riot broke out at the El Paso Criminal Justice Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado over the quality of the food served to inmates by Trinity. In New Hampshire in 2019, more than 200 inmate meals prepared by Trinity were uneaten in a single day when prisoners refused to come out of their cells after discovering bugs and worms in their food on numerous occasions. Similar issues and complaints in Utah, Arizona and Georgia prompted St. Louis County council members to request additional information from Trinity and the County Justice Service as they considered a one-year contract with Trinity in 2020.

At a time when every job is important and where the nutritional well-being of detainees is of paramount importance, it behooves you to carefully consider all relevant facts, and possibly seek additional information, before voting for the selection of Trinity. Please ask yourself if supporting Trinity is truly in the best interests of the County of Cook.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfonso Garcia
President
UNITE HERE Local 450

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alfonso Garcia".

06/22/2021