WEP

Work Experience Program......

New York City's Public Sector Sweat Shop Economy

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This report was supported with funding by:
Acknowledgements

This survey was a complete organizational effort and was made possible by a large number of people and organizations. First, we would like to thank the Rockefeller Foundation, for support of our Participatory Research Action Projects and our public policy advocacy work on job creation welfare and workfare. We would also like to thank the North Star and the New York Foundation for funds to hire community youth to help us in surveying workfare workers during CVH’s Summer Youth Organizing Project. We would also like to express special thanks to the National Employment Law Project for helping us to think of ways to develop the survey and for making the right contacts within the labor movement to answer critical questions about what union workers were doing at their city jobs. Matthew Schneider from the New York Legal Assistance Group helped to direct us to workfare workers who were doing administrative work for the city. Don Friedman and Liz Acceles from Community Food Resource Center helped provide information on welfare benefits, and The American Sociological Association’s Community Action Research Initiative provided support for the processing of the data.

This project was initiated over one year ago by a group of dedicated and hardworking Community Voices Heard members including Brenda Banks, Verdia Rosenin, Jimmy Johnson, Michelle Palmer, Jackie Marte, Ellena Carmichael, Tyletha Samuels, and Martha Castro. These members brainstormed about ways to prove to the public and elected officials that workfare workers were making a contribution to New York City’s quality of life and in fact doing real work while in workfare. We give thanks to those members who created the beginning of this research project. CVH staff including Community Organizers Elaine Kim and Diomaris Maya, as well as our Summer Youth Organizers, Jason Reyes, Evelyn Rogers, and Wanda Acevedo who also played an important role in collecting surveys and organizing workfare sites. We would also like to express gratitude to Jim Levendos who photographed the subjects for the workfare profiles and assisted with layout and editing.

Finally we would like to thank the hundreds of workfare workers, CVH members and, especially the workfare workers who agreed to be interviewed and tell their story for the purpose of this report.

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4

I. Introduction 12

II. History 13

III. What Workfare Workers Do On the Job 13
   A. Department of Parks and Recreation 15
   B. Department of City Administrative Services 18
   C. Clerical Aides 21
   D. Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) 24
   E. Social Service Non-Profits & Schools 26

IV. New York City is Displacing Workers 27

V. Workfare’s Public Sector Workforce: Sweatshop On the Hudson 28
   A. The Financial Incentive’s for New York City to Replace Union Workers with Workfare Workers 29
   B. New York City’s Workfare Program: Keeping Workers Living Below Poverty 30

VI. Training 31

VII. What Workfare Workers Want 32

VIII. Worker Profiles

IX. Appendices
   A. Survey Design and Methods 33
   B. Equation for Per-hour Cost to the City of New York for WEP Work 33
   C. Calculation for Hourly City Cost for DPR WEP Workers’ Work 34

X. Site Profiles 35

XI. Sample Surveys 40
COMMUNITY VOICES HEARD
COUNT OUR WORK REPORT

The Work Experience Program (WEP):
New York City’s Public Sector Sweatshop Economy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

This report will make the case that tens of thousands of workfare workers are working in city agencies performing vital functions for the city for no pay. Yet while they play an important role in running New York City, they are not getting paid for an honest day’s work. Instead, they are forced to work off below poverty-level benefits in jobs that once provided families with a real living wage and enough income to survive in New York City. Previously, paid workers were allowed to unionize, protected by employee rights, and able to access benefits such as vacation time, unemployment insurance and social security. Today, workfare workers are displacing these paid union workers, they are denied the right to organize, and they are denied basic worker benefits. Worst of all they are consigned to participate in a government-run, sweatshop type program that keeps them mired in poverty and that by its structure, cuts off their only source of income when they begin to fight for economic justice and equal pay. While the city enjoys untold prosperity, economic growth, improved city services, and renewed parks and street-life, it is at a price: tens of thousands of people forced to work as no-wage workers in New York City’s public sector and non-profit labor force.

Because these workers are only being compensated for their important work by their meager welfare benefits, which are significantly below the poverty level, and are not allowed to organize and face punitive loss of their only source of income if they question and try to change their working conditions, we believe that the conditions workfare workers face in New York City are akin to a “publicly funded” sweatshop, which all New Yorkers ultimately benefit from through their use of city services, from city parks to administrative offices. Finally, for many workfare workers, especially those with limited education and employment experience, lack of English proficiency, older workers, and people of color, especially immigrants, workfare is the only way that they can be guaranteed any means of support. Ultimately, they are forced to work in this second tier economy.

Background

In the summer of 1999, Community Voices Heard (CVH), an organization of people on welfare and in workfare, initiated a research project to determine what workfare workers were doing at their Work Experience Program (WEP) assignments in New York City. Our members increasingly reported being forced to do more detailed work and performing significant work responsibilities at their work-sites. CVH commissioned the study to prove that WEP workers
were not just performing make-work assignments, but rather were responsible for providing critical services to the city.

Currently there are approximately 40,000 people in New York City’s workfare program. Workfare workers work in city agencies, private not-for-profit agencies, and in certain instances private-for-profit entities such as South Street Seaport and Fulton Fish Market. Workfare workers are not paid a wage for the work they perform. Instead, they are seen as compensating the city for their public assistance grants. Accordingly, they are not eligible for collective bargaining or unemployment insurance, and receive neither social security payments for the work they do nor Earned Income Tax Credits. Many workfare workers are also engaged in 35 hour simulated work weeks, that combine workfare jobs with mandatory programs such as job search, which requires workfare workers and public assistance recipients to engage in useless activities looking for work, such as calling up store and businesses in the phone book.

Purpose of the Report

This report demonstrates that workfare is displacing paid union entry level employees with a second tier of unpaid workfare workers who are doing a substantial portion, if not the entire workload, of formerly paid entry-level employees working in New York City’s public agencies. This report proves that workfare is in fact a public employment program, in which workers are performing critical services for the citizens of the city for no pay and keeps people trapped in poverty while displacing a full-time union workforce. This report also proves that WEP is an illegal and illegitimate program that threatens the economic livelihood of current, and future, employees by violating state labor law because it displaces city workers and provides incentives for further displacement.

II. Overall Findings

A. Workfare workers are performing jobs that are critical to keeping New York City agencies operating, vital services rendered and New York City clean and maintained. Workfare workers are doing critical work for the city, ranging from keeping parks clean and safe, doing light repair work and doing entry-level receptionist duties. While the vast majority of workfare workers are performing entry-level jobs, many are also doing more complex jobs with higher degrees of responsibility, including supervising and training other workfare workers, opening and closing city buildings and parks, and assisting the general public with community problems.

• Workfare workers do valuable work for their fellow New Yorkers. We have found that they perform almost every one of the tasks in three categories of entry-level City worker job descriptions (City Parks Workers, Custodial Assistant, and Clerical Aide). We have also found that workfare workers in the Metropolitan Transit Authority are also responsible for station cleaning and garbage removal and that workfare workers in social service agencies are also providing critical community services such as day care, childcare and nursing assistance.
• Workfare workers are performing basic services that keep New York City clean and efficiently operating. The survey has found that contrary to popular perception WEP workers in the Parks Department only report raking or sweeping as 27% of the tasks they perform. In fact at least 37% of an average workfare workers job in the Parks Department involves more responsible tasks such as laying sod and hedge trimming, minor repairs and safety checks of equipment. In the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, workfare workers are doing a wide range of jobs including cleaning bathrooms and replacing supplies; scrubbing, waxing and polishing floors; vacuuming rugs and carpets and even operating elevators. Clerical workers are answering phones, typing and serving as receptionists. They are also processing forms and information requests.

• In many cases, workfare workers are doing jobs that have more responsibility than entry-level job titles. Workfare workers surveyed for this project report doing such tasks as supervising other workfare workers, operating light equipment, and managing case records. In the Clerical and Office Aide Category, 13% report supervising other WEPs. In Department of Citywide Agencies, 8% report supervising workfare workers and in the Parks Department, 7% report this activity. In addition, many workfare workers are taking care of children and the elderly in non-profit agencies.

• Both the survey data and individual case studies show that workfare workers are also engaged in other critical jobs, including opening and closing parks and recreation centers, assisting directors of jobs centers and Medicaid offices, and performing critical public safety duties. Many workfare workers in the Parks Department report doing safety checks of park and recreation centers that are used by the public and are responsible for opening and closing park gazebos, bathrooms and offices. Other workfare workers report being responsible for recording complaints about unsafe trees, community problems, and are working as social service case aides, assisting people with their domestic violence problems.

B. New York City is violating New York State Social Service Law by using welfare recipients in jobs formerly done by regular workers. New York State Social Service Law protects unionized municipal workers against being displaced by workfare workers. The law covers both full and partial displacement. We have found that at least partial, and very likely full, displacement is happening in city agencies.

• At least 86% of all survey respondents in all categories report doing the same work as municipal employees at their WEP sites.

• Workfare workers are performing 35 of the 36 tasks in the three union job titles that we surveyed. (City Parks Workers, Custodial Assistant, and Clerical Aide).

• In some cases workfare workers are doing work that is not a listed activity on entry-level jobs descriptions, meaning they are doing work that was previously done by union employees and/or are doing tasks that other workers are supposed to be doing.
• Even if one assumes a worker does every job in his or her job description (which most workers do not), the average individual workfare worker is doing 36.7% of the work done by similarly situated union workers.

C. Workfare creates a source of cheap labor for the City of New York and threatens the city labor force because of the huge financial incentive to the city to expand workfare as an inexpensive way to get the city's entry level positions filled. Because the welfare grant that workfare workers get in exchange for their labor is mostly subsidized with state and federal dollars, there is a great incentive for the city to expand the program and to replace unionized city workers with workfare workers. In addition, even when federal and state aid is included, the average annual salary for workfare workers is well below the poverty line.

• The cost to the City for an hour of a workfare worker's wage is only $1.80 an hour. This figure is based on the average number of hours worked per week and the city's share of the welfare benefit check.

• Based on a 40 hour workweek, 50 weeks a year, the annual cost to the city of a workfare worker's pay is only $3,600 a year, compared to an annual salary of between $18,000 – $22,000 a year for an entry-level union worker in a similar position.

D. Workfare workers are working at below poverty-level wages while the New York City public sector has developed into a two tier system of workers: union workers who work for benefits above the poverty level and workfare workers performing the same functions for below poverty level wages and are under constant threat of losing their only source of income.

• On the average, a single adult who is working 22 hours a week, is making at the most $5,724 a year in benefits including food stamps.

• A Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) parent with two children (the average parent on welfare), who works and/or is forced into other work-related activities for 35 hours a week is at the most receiving $10,344 a year in benefits.

• These figures mean that workfare workers are working for pay that puts them between 63-77% of the poverty level and should be classified as the "working poor".

• In all three categories of union labor, salaries are kept above the poverty level, while in no case is the welfare benefit for workfare workers at that level, in spite of the fact that the two do substantially the same work. A City Parks worker makes an annual salary of $22,011 a year and a Safety Net recipient in workfare makes $5,478 a year (working just over half time). A Custodial Assistant working for $20,353 a year and a Family
Assistance recipient with one child working at the same job makes $8,220 a year (full time).

E. Workfare workers are not trainees but are rather workers performing tasks that are done, or were formally done by union employees. While it is clear that many of the jobs done by WEP workers require generally low skill levels, it is wrong to assume that workfare workers are “trainees.”

- Less than a quarter of workfare workers, 24.76%, of the respondents to the survey reported getting any regular training on the job.
- Only 17.19% of workfare workers reported getting any health and safety training
- Among the group who reported getting regular training, 84.28% of those workfare workers could not be specific about its content

F. Workfare workers want to work and a majority wants to get paid for the work they do. The clear majority of survey respondents, when asked how they would want to change workfare responded that they would prefer to be paid for the work they do (73.36%).

IV. Findings by Sector

A. Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR): DPR workers are working in all of the department's facilities in New York City, from Central Park to local neighborhood parks. While a vast majority of WEP Workers in DPR are doing work that much of the public equates with workfare i.e., sweeping pathways, raking leaves, and emptying garbage cans (all part of the union job description for entry-level parks employees), a significant number of workfare workers report doing other major parks maintenance tasks. This includes almost 24.8% who report mowing or edging lawns, 13.9% who do safety checks of equipment, 12.1% who lay sod and trim hedges, and 11.5% who do minor repairs.

B. Janitorial and Maintenance WEP Workers: Most WEP workers performing janitorial and maintenance work are placed in the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). DCAS workers are responsible for maintaining and cleaning city properties and office buildings including administrative offices, court buildings and public buildings such as City Hall. Approximately 80% of these workers are cleaning office buildings by sweeping and mopping floors, emptying and removing garbage and cleaning bathrooms. Approximately half these workers are cleaning mirrors and glass and replacing bathroom supplies and approximately 30% are washing walls, waxing and polishing floors, dusting and cleaning blinds, polishing furniture and fixtures, sweeping and washing sidewalks. Approximately 10% are operating elevators and replacing bulbs and fixtures.

C. Clerical and Office WEP Workers: WEP workers are working in a variety of city offices including the Office of Employment Services, neighborhood Jobs Centers, Department of
Housing and Preservation and in borough buildings and schools. Clerical WEP workers are doing the tasks of a basic entry-level office aide. A majority of work that people report doing includes filing records (83.8%), answering phones (62.9%) and keeping records (56.2%). Almost 50% of workers report doing receptionist duties, and approximately 25% of are giving directions and answering questions and inquiries, preparing mailings and typing and precessing forms.

D. Transit WEP Workers: Transit WEP Workers report doing the highest level of work that corresponds to permanent workers in a city agency. Over 90.5% of the people workfare workers we surveyed reported doing the same work as permanent employees. Over 80% of the reported tasks of transit workfare workers include cleaning and polishing surfaces, emptying garbage cans and sweeping stairs and street areas. Seventy-five percent (75%) are dusting handrails and turnstiles.

E. Social Service Agencies/Not-for-Profits: Respondents worked primarily in daycare and senior care facilities, though one did domestic violence crisis intervention, and another did clerical work at a CUNY College. The WEP workers in nonprofits and schools worked longer hours than WEP workers in any of the other categories. Ten of nineteen respondents in these jobs worked at least 70 hours every two weeks (full time), six worked at least 48 hours, and two worked 35 hours every two weeks. These figures suggest that the vast majority of WEP workers in these positions are mothers with children in the TANF program. Duties included reading to children, putting them down to sleep, and serving lunches and snacks, twelve respondents were teacher’s aides in public schools. Eleven of these—as well as two others, one who worked as a cafeteria aide, and the other who did not specify her jobs—worked full time. A majority of the respondents had worked in their public school placements for a year or more.

IV. Recommendations

A. The Work Experience Program (WEP), should be dismantled in both the public and private sector, as it currently exists. In its place, the following programs should immediately be implemented:

➢ All welfare recipients should be assessed, evaluated and placed in programs that provide training, skills development and real opportunity for permanent, living-wage employment. Examples of programs include the Transitional Jobs Program, BEGIN College Option, and education and training programs, such as GED, English as a Second Language, and other qualified training programs.

➢ The Mayor and Human Resource Administration should implement the New York City Transitional Jobs Program, passed in April 2000 by the City Council immediately.

➢ Workfare workers should be removed from and no longer placed in public sector agencies where they currently displace union workers, depress wages and eliminate entry-level jobs. New funding should be secured by the city to replace
lost entry-level positions in city agencies to the 1990 levels. Workfare workers with at least one-year experience in the agency should be asked to submit their names for employment and be prioritized for hiring.

➢ Workfare workers should be removed from and no longer placed in private not-for-profit agencies where they eliminate current and entry-level jobs.

➢ Compulsory “work activities” should include programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL), GED courses, secondary education, on-the-job with pay training programs and other programs that build real skills, education and experience.

B. The Transitional Jobs Program, which creates public sector and not-for-profit living-wage jobs for people on welfare, should be implemented, fully funded and expanded to accommodate public assistance recipients currently engaged in work activities. This program, which already exists in New York City law, but is not being implemented by the Mayor should be immediately implemented. It should be funded through TANF surplus funds, welfare-to-work dollars and general budget surplus dollars. The program, which protects existing employees through strong anti-displacement measures, should be expanded to cover all welfare recipients who are forced into work participation activities in both the public and not-for-profit sector.

C. The Mayor and City Council of New York City, the New York State Legislature and the New York State Department of Labor (DOL) should implement the following mechanisms to ensure complete and total compliance with New York State Social Services law and to ensure that partial and complete displacement of city workers by workfare workers not taking place in city agencies:

➢ New York City and the New York State Department of Labor should make public the number of WEP workers placed at each city agency in an annual report, and track how many are removed each year, with the goal that this number reach zero within three years.

➢ The New York State Legislature and New York City Council must enact legislation that ensures that workfare workers working in public sector and private not-for-profit agencies, are entitled to the comparable wage for the position that they are doing.

➢ New York City and the New York State Department of Labor should implement a grievance procedure through which both WEP workers and city workers can report partial and total displacement taking place in public sector industries so that these illegal activities can be investigated and halted.

➢ New York City and New York State Department of Labor should implement a public education and rights training for both regularly employed and workfare workers to ensure that workers know their rights regarding displacement.
➢ The NYS Department of Labor should impose monetary penalties on any New York City agency that continues to engage in practices that create partial and complete displacement of union workers by workfare workers.
I. Introduction

While Mayor Giuliani and the administrators of the Human Resource Administration hail the success of New York City’s workfare and welfare-to-work programs in moving people off of welfare, they have come under increasing criticism. There are allegations of nepotism and corruption in the contracting process for welfare-to-work programs. Instead of adequate training and education, welfare recipients are directed to dead-end jobs as telephone psychics. The system of public support for those in need is being accused of turning away those most in need, with lawsuits filed by community groups and federal investigations into improper denial of benefits to applicants underway. There are charges of sexual harassment and discrimination against non-English-speaking applicants for welfare and in the workfare program. Finally, there are also lawsuits against the displacement of public employees.

These occurrences have not only tarnished the programs, but have begun to assemble an increasingly stronger case that the City of New York’s welfare-to-work programs are not successfully helping people move of welfare and into jobs, but in fact are based on harassing people who are entitled to assistance and are breaking city, state and federal law. They show that a serious lack of accountability has characterized New York’s welfare policies in recent years. This report will add to the case that New York City’s welfare policies are largely illegal, and rather then helping poor people move off of welfare, instead continue to keep people enmeshed in poverty, with no hope or assistance in making a better life for themselves or their families.

This report will specifically call into question the legality of the Work Experience Program (WEP), New York City’s workfare program, and to demand that the city account for the harm it does to welfare workers and regular municipal workers alike. It demonstrates that workfare workers remain trapped in poverty while being forced to perform jobs critical to keeping New York City agencies operating efficiently. It graphically illustrates that WEP violates state social services law by displacing city workers. The report shows that WEP not only keeps people on welfare in poverty, but also threatens the livelihoods of those already employed because of the huge financial savings for the city when using workfare laborers over regular workers. We believe that this report will prove that unless the Work Experience Program is dismantled, meaningful employment under decent conditions will be put further out of reach for the very New Yorkers who are helping the city to be more effective and efficient in its operations.

In the summer of 1999, members, staff, and interns from Community Voices Heard undertook the survey that forms the backbone of this report. Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a membership organization of low-income people that has been active in ensuring fair treatment of welfare recipients and workfare workers for over five years, and has played a leading role in successful coalitions for job-creation programs. CVH members in WEP had long complained that they did the same work as regular employees at their worksites. Yet, workfare workers are not paid a wage. Instead, they are seen as compensating the city for their public assistance grants. Accordingly, they are not eligible for collective bargaining or unemployment insurance, and receive neither social security payments for the work they do nor Earned
Income Tax Credits. CVH members wanted to see whether workfare workers in other sites were also doing the same work as regular employees, and to find out what policy changes other workfare workers would want to see in the program.

Between June 1999 and February 2000, CVH members, staff and interns interviewed 649 WEP workers at 131 worksites in Manhattan and the Bronx. Where possible, we used job descriptions in entry-level union job titles as the basis for our questionnaire. We combined these findings with previous research on WEP, and arrived at findings beyond those expected.

After completing the survey and tabulating the results, we found that in at least three union job titles, partial displacement—where workfare workers were doing the same or similar tasks as unionized workers—was rampant. This partial displacement is illegal. CVH members have long argued that they should get paid for the work they do in workfare assignments. The survey results also show that the incentives for the city to use workfare labor instead of unionized workers making a decent salary is such that workfare workers are unlikely ever to get real wages for the jobs they do, as long as WEP remains in place.

II. HISTORY - EXPANSION OF NEW YORK CITY'S WORKFARE PROGRAM

In 1995, Mayor Giuliani expanded New York City's workfare program from one covering about 10,000 welfare recipients to one that by 1999 covered nearly 40,000 at any one time. The program's work requirements were strengthened. Instead of emphasizing training and education activities to help move welfare recipients into the labor market, the workfare program—known as the Work Experience Program, or "WEP"—emphasizes a "work-first" approach. Welfare recipients are compelled to work in municipal agencies or in nonprofit organizations with contracts with the City. WEP workers' hours are calculated by dividing their cash, food stamps and shelter allowances by the minimum wage. They work, on average, over 43 hours every two weeks, and are in mandatory job-search activities for much of the rest of the time. Though their work is not considered "employment"—which means that they cannot claim the Earned Income Tax Credit, unemployment insurance, social security credit, or food stamp benefits beyond those they already get—they perform the same or similar tasks as many regular municipal workers. And in contrast to the regular employees with whom they work, WEP worker benefits put them well below the poverty level, and they do not get sick leave or vacation.

III. WHAT WORKFARE WORKERS DO WHERE THEY WORK

On the work site they would give us a sheet about what we have to do and what we don't have to do. What we are supposed to do and what we are not supposed to do...but as a WEP worker I had to empty out storage rooms full of garbage and stuff. I had things to do that wasn't that wasn't on the sheet.

Adelberto, Former Workfare Worker
I work at a park in Manhattan. I started June '97. I work as the receptionist and as a clerk signing in people, community service people and the workers too. I answer phones, take messages and do filing for my supervisor. Sometimes the boss gives me the key to open in the morning--sometimes it's open already. I go in. I sign in my time sheet. The workers come I give them the time sheet to sign in. Then I wait for the community service people. I sign them in. I answer the phone when the phone rings, take messages for my supervisor and help out. I put together the packets for workers with their names and information on it for when they come to work.

Donnie, Department of Parks and Recreation
Clerical Workfare Worker

Workfare Workers are performing jobs that are critical to keeping New York City Agencies operating, vital services rendered and keeping New York City maintained. Contrary to what the Mayor says, workfare workers are doing critical work for the city, ranging from keeping parks clean and safe, light repair work and entry-level receptionist duties. While the vast majority of workfare workers are performing entry level jobs, many are also doing more complex jobs with higher degrees of responsibility, including supervising and training other workfare workers, opening and closing city buildings and parks, and assisting the general public with community problems.

- **Workfare workers do valuable work for their fellow New Yorkers.** We have found that they perform almost every one of the tasks in three categories of entry-level City worker job descriptions in Department of Parks and Recreation, Clerical Aide and Maintenance Worker. Over 90% of the workfare workers we surveyed in the Metropolitan Transit Authority also report that they are doing the same work that transit workers do.

- **Workfare workers are performing basic services that keep New York City clean and operating efficiently.** The survey has found that contrary to popular perception, WEP workers in the Parks Department are only raking or sweeping 27% of the time. In fact at least 37% of an average workfare worker's job in the Parks Department involves more responsible tasks such as laying sod and hedge trimming, minor repairs and safety checks of equipment. In the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, workfare workers are doing a wide range of jobs including cleaning bathrooms and replacing supplies; scrubbing, waxing and polishing floors; vacuuming rugs and carpets, and even operating elevators. Clerical workers are answering phones, typing and processing and serving as receptionists. They are also processing forms and information requests.

- **In many cases, Workfare Workers are doing jobs that have more responsibility than entry-level job titles.** Workfare workers surveyed for this project report doing such tasks as supervising other workfare workers, operating light equipment, and managing case records. In the Clerical and Office Aide Category, 13% report supervising other WEPS. In Department
of Citywide Agencies 8% report supervising workfare workers and in the Parks Department, 7% report this activity.

- Both the survey data and individual case studies show that workfare workers are also engaged in other critical jobs, including opening and closing parks and recreation centers, assisting directors of job centers and Medicaid offices, and performing critical public safety duties. Many workfare workers in the Parks Department report doing safety check of park and recreation centers used by the public, and opening and closing park gazebos, bathrooms and offices. Other workfare workers report being responsible for recording complaints about unsafe trees, community problems and dangerous situations, and are acting as social service case aides, assisting people with their domestic violence problems

### A. Department of Parks and Recreation

*Painting is done there on a daily basis I would say because graffiti is always there. But let's say basically like a big paint job, for example the handball courts and the baseball fields, all these things have to be repainted twice a year. We do this, the workfare workers do this kind of work -- all the painting there we do. You won't see a company coming from outside or the same city workers doing it -- only workfare workers are doing this kind of job.*

Armando, DPR Workfare Worker

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has been the largest single user of WEP labor in the City, and among the most enthusiastic. Yet, while New York City's parks, once in relative disrepair, now rate higher in overall condition and cleanliness than in recent years, they have been the epicenter of displacement and partial displacement of paid workers by workfare workers who are compensated below the poverty rate. Mayor Giuliani and Commissioner Henry Stern understand WEP workers' key role in the parks' turnaround. Here's what the Department of Parks and Recreation's "Eight Seasons 1996-1997" Report said:

*The biggest contributor to the improved cleanliness of New York City's parks has been the workfare program, known as the Work Experience Program (WEP). By the fall of 1997, more than 6,000 able-bodied welfare recipients, men and women, were working approximately 21 hours a week in parks, helping to paint benches, shovel snow, rake leaves and pick up litter in exchange for their benefits.*

Yet, during this time, WEP workers were often badly mistreated in the Parks Department and had to organize, demonstrate and even go to court in order to get gloves and other equipment when cleaning up garbage from the parks.¹

But aside from the indignities to which WEP workers were subjected, they also began to do a
good deal of work that was formerly done by employees in a decimated Department of Parks
and Recreation. "They're saving our lives" is how one DPR administrator put it in 1995.\(^2\) WEP workers would only be in the position of "lifesaving" if they were doing work that was
formerly done by regular DPR employees. Our survey found that that is exactly what is
happening.

Figure 1 shows what an "average" DPR WEP worker does, regardless of the DPR worksite at
which he or she works.\(^3\) While the bulk of the work involves maintaining and cleaning, nearly
half the work WEP workers in the survey reported doing involved other tasks.

![Figure 1. DPR WEP Workers' Work Across Worksites](image)

If we consider the work that a single DPR WEP worker performs at a given worksite, we find
that he or she is doing an average of 35.38% of the work in a City Parks worker job
description. Thus, while different WEP workers do different tasks depending on the worksite,
taken together, DPR WEP workers do all the work in that job title. Figure 2 shows the
distribution of work done by DPR WEP workers. In addition to the tasks listed below (which
are drawn from the City Parks worker job description), DPR WEP workers reported painting
benches and pools, salting ice and snow, taking inventory, answering phones and opening and
closing the parks.\(^4\)

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3. The pie chart, like others below, is generated by totaling across all WEP workers in this job
category.

4. See Steven Cohen, "Managing Workfare: The Case of the New York City Parks Department,"
Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, Graduate Program in Public
It is clear that WEP workers are at least partially displacing City Parks workers. A lawsuit to this effect has been filed by the Parks Worker's Local 1505 of DC37. Moreover, a recent suit by Civil Service Painters against DPR's use of WEP workers to displace union workers in those titles was settled out of court. Though the fact that WEP workers are doing work within a current job description of union employees provides some evidence of displacement there other factors that also support the argument that displacement is happening. For example, Table 1 shows the headcount of unionized City Parks workers from 1990 to 1999. While clear reductions predated the widespread introduction of WEP in January 1995, the reductions continued under the Giuliani administration commensurate with those predating it. A particularly steep drop occurs between 1994 and 1996.

Table 1. Headcount of Unionized City Parks Workers
(percent change from previous year)\(^5\)

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<td>1556</td>
<td>1346</td>
<td>1272</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.19%)</td>
<td>(-13.50%)</td>
<td>(-5.50%)</td>
<td>(-5.66%)</td>
<td>(-15.17%)</td>
<td>(-10.41%)</td>
<td>(-1.97%)</td>
<td>(-10.63%)</td>
<td>(0.50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) As total headcount decreases, percent change from previous year increases. This means that smaller cuts in later years appear to have larger effects than numerically equivalent cuts in earlier ones. This may or may not always be the case, but cutting from an already-downsized agency may also have even greater ill effects.

Policy and Administration (March 1999) for a similar perspective, though from the point-of-view of DPR management.
Moreover, nearly ninety percent (89.48%) of WEP workers in Parks reported doing the same work as regular employees. Only 19.88% of the respondents said that they received regular training at their worksites, less than one-fifth (17.54%) reported receiving regular health and safety training, and just over ten percent (11.11%) reported receiving training in the use of maintenance equipment.

The incentive to displace regular workers is evident in DPR. Because most DPR WEP workers are recipients of Safety Net Assistance (SNA), the per-hour cost to the City is slightly higher than for WEP workers in general. As a result, the average DPR WEP worker in our survey costs the City just $2.19 per hour (see Appendix for formula). Annualized, the average DPR WEP worker costs the city only $2,246 per year. If we were to annualize the average WEP worker hours for a 40-hour-a-week job, for comparasion sake only, the total cost to the City would come to $4,380. This figure is substantially less than the $22,011 the City pays for full-time union worker.

The Parks Workers' local has sued the Giuliani administration for displacing its members. WEP workers themselves are no happier about the situation. Overwhelmingly, DPR WEP workers wanted to be paid for the jobs they did (75.15%), rather than collecting meager benefits in exchange for their work. Twenty three percent each said they would rather get training for another job and to have WEP count as real job experience. Slightly fewer (22.07%) said that they would like to have their hours calculated by prevailing wages for the work they do.

### B. Department of CITYWIDE ADMINISTRATION SERVICES (DCAS)

_I worked in the Museo Del Barrio in East Harlem for about a year. There are between 8-12 workfare workers in the museum doing maintenance and some clerical work. Everyday, we would sign in on the time-sheet and see our supervisor who would give us our work assignments for the day. Workfare workers did all the housekeeping work, all the cleaning, there were no paid workers in housecleaning. We sweep, mop, clean bathrooms, and dispose of garbage and empty trash cans. Sometimes we would run errands. Everyday we did the same job, just like a regular worker, except we didn’t get paid, we didn’t get a pay check._

Ellera DCAS Maintenance Workfare Worker

Displacement and partial displacement have not been limited to DPR. WEP workers fill maintenance and janitorial positions in a variety of city agencies. Many are placed in Housing Authority public housing projects (NYCHA); most are placed in the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS, formerly known as the Department of General Services). DCAS WEP workers, upon whom this section reports, are important in keeping up City properties, including city office buildings and courts.
DCAS WEP workers perform all but one of the tasks in the custodial assistant job description. As Figure 3 shows, DCAS WEP workers perform a wide spectrum of maintenance work in the department, filling out the City custodial assistant’s job description, when their work is taken together.

![Job Duties Performed](image)

**Figure 3. DCAS WEP Workers’ Work Across Worksites**

Individual respondents to the survey in maintenance and janitorial positions in DCAS reported performing an average of 35.3 percent of the tasks in the City custodial assistant’s job description. Figure 4, below, shows the distribution of tasks they perform.
It is clear that WEP workers are doing a good deal of City custodial assistant’s work, and that regular workers are being at least partially displaced by workfare. WEP workers understand this as well. Like their counterparts in DPR, nearly 86% of DCAS WEP workers also reported doing the same work as regular workers at their worksites.

Maintenance and janitorial WEP workers are somewhat less likely to be Safety Net Assistance recipients than are their DPR counterparts.⁶ Accordingly, the hourly cost to the City for their work decreases. Using the same methods of estimation as those used above, we can estimate the average cost to the City for an hour’s worth of WEP workers’ work in DCAS to be $2.00. Annualized, at the average DCAS WEP worker costs the city only $1,296 per year. If we were to annualize the average WEP worker hours for a 40-hour-a-week job, for comparison sake only, the total figure would come to $4,160. This figure is substantially less than the

⁶ Judging from reported food stamp and grant allocations among the respondents (which are not reported in this report because of difficulties in ascertaining their reliability), it appears that just over twice as many (nearly 20 percent) WEP workers in maintenance and janitorial positions in DCAS were SNA recipients. It is worth remarking that despite the fact that the City may keep figures on the precise breakdown of WEP workers by agency placement and welfare category, these are not reported to the public, and any requests for such aggregate information are turned down for reasons of “confidentiality.”
the City pays for union worker. The problem lies not in the shifting of costs of valuable work to the state and federal governments. Rather, the problem lies in the City’s taking advantage of an incentive to displace regular employees.

The survey for DCAS WEP workers is consistent with the overall findings and with those among DPR WEP workers in that a vast majority of DCAS WEP workers want to be paid for the work they do (78.43%). Smaller percentages of respondents expressed wishes to receive more training for another job (9.9%), real experience at the WEP site (11.76%) and to be compensated at a prevailing-wage equivalent (14.71%).

WEP workers doing maintenance and janitorial work know that they already are workers, and want to get paid for their work. Few reported getting regular training on the job (25.81%, overall), while the percentage of respondents report having received specific training was again small (23.42% and 14.56%, respectively, for health and safety training and equipment training).

The City’s housing projects, offices and museums benefit from the maintenance work WEP workers are doing. If the average maintenance and janitorial WEP worker costs the City $2.00 per hour (using the same assumptions as used above), at an annualized rate in a 40-hour-per-week job, the cost to the City would be merely $2,172 per year (actual) and $4,160 based upon a 40 hour work week. Again, this is a fraction of the cost of a union maintenance worker. Counting food stamps, an average maintenance and janitorial WEP worker’s benefits rise to $6,667.20 per year, well below the poverty line for all households. Regular custodial assistants, however, would have to be the sole support for five dependents in order to live below the federal poverty level (see above).

C. CLERICAL AND OFFICE AIDES

We answer phones, we file and we help out with Jiggett cases and fair hearing decisions. But we only do the part to check and see if it’s on the system, if it is money that is issued on the computer. We make sure people’s checks are ready and help them find their case worker by going to the computer and punching in their case number and find their worker. We transfer them to their worker. We also have to go downstairs, take information from clients to take upstairs to the workers. Typically everything. We do everything except clean. I don’t do custodial work.

Deborah HRA Clerical Workforce Worker

WEP workers performing clerical and office work receive little coverage in the media. Most people are not even aware of their existence, as Clerical WEP workers work inside and are not identifiable by the orange vests often worn by DPR WEP workers.

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7 The discrepancy between the general figure and the (higher) specific figure likely reflects the presence of a health and safety orientation at some DCAS workplaces.
In our survey, 108 WEP workers worked in clerical and office assignments. The overwhelming majority worked either at the WEP headquarters (Office of Employment Services on 16th Street) or in one of the neighborhood Income Maintenance or Job centers. Many others worked at 100 Gold Street (the Department of Housing Preservation and Development). Still others worked at the Board of Education, in neighborhood offices of the Housing Authority, in the Municipal Building, in schools, and in Parks Department offices.

Like their counterparts in other assignments, clerical and office WEP workers did all of the tasks in the entry-level union job title. Figure 5 shows what the average clerical and office WEP worker does, totaled across all worksites.

**Figure 5. Clerical and Office WEP Workers’ Work Across Worksites**

![Pie chart showing work distribution]

In clerical and Office WEP assignments, individual WEP workers reported doing 37.8 percent of the work in a unionized clerical aide’s job description. Figure 6 shows the distribution of tasks performed by clerical and office WEP workers. As Table 4 shows, greater percentages of clerical and office WEP workers reported doing each of the tasks in their relevant job descriptions, overall, than did maintenance and janitorial or DPR WEP workers.
WEP workers in clerical and office positions were least likely to report wanting to get paid for the work they already do. Still, over two-thirds of the respondents (66.94%) chose this option. A greater percentage of clerical and office WEP workers also wanted to get training for other jobs (28.1%). One possible interpretation of these data is that there are higher proportions of Family Assistance recipients in clerical and office placements. It may be that the difference in the data reflects the different priorities and aspirations of the greater number of parents in these worksites from those of the largely single workers in the others. Nevertheless, a slightly lower percentage of clerical and office WEP workers reported doing the same work as regular workers than did their counterparts in DCAS and DPR (81.67%).

If we focus on clerical workers at the Human Resources Administration, however, we may see that some of the apparent discrepancy between these figures reflects the effects of full and not just partial displacement. At HRA, ongoing, serious staff reductions since 1990—with half of the total in 1995 and after—were coupled with a shift in job titles in 1996, reflecting the
outlines of new contractual agreements with the City, the longstanding use of WEP workers in the workplace, and the anticipation of more. Table 3 summarizes these changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HRA/DSS</th>
<th>April 1</th>
<th>April 19</th>
<th>March 19</th>
<th>April 19</th>
<th>April 19</th>
<th>April 19</th>
<th>April 19</th>
<th>Nov. 19</th>
<th>Nov. 1</th>
<th>April 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office Aide</td>
<td>3225</td>
<td>2908</td>
<td>2719</td>
<td>2537</td>
<td>2249</td>
<td>1556</td>
<td>1494</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Assoc.</td>
<td>2429</td>
<td>2322</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1708</td>
<td>1333</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TSA</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>365</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Aide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clerical Asso</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2525</td>
<td>2424</td>
<td>2388</td>
<td>2391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6324</td>
<td>5881</td>
<td>5376</td>
<td>5090</td>
<td>4437</td>
<td>3254</td>
<td>2648</td>
<td>2543</td>
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<td>2519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>-7.01</td>
<td>-8.58</td>
<td>-5.32</td>
<td>-12.83</td>
<td>-26.65</td>
<td>-18.62</td>
<td>-3.97</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: District Council 37, AFSCME

WEP workers are de facto the bulk of the employees in the new clerical aide job title, as our survey shows. They are not, however, paid to do this work. In fact, if we look at the number of hours worked by clerical and office WEP workers, we see that fully one-quarter reported working essentially full time for their benefits (65 or more hours per two-week period). For their efforts, these full-time workers, fulfilling duties in a union job title, are kept below the poverty line.

D. MTA TRANSIT WORKFARE WORKERS

All I know is as a WEP worker I worked more than I do now. As a WEP worker I had more duties than I do now as a regular employee, and I worked harder. Don’t get me wrong I work now, as a paid worker, but I work at my own pace. But it’s not the same when you’re in workfare, and you are going around and you have to do four other stations. Now, I got two stations to clean in my shift, before it was four stations we had to do. So we were constantly on the move and then depending on how many people you have in your group, if you have less, it could take longer to clean the stations.

Former Transit Workfare Worker
Now Employed by the MTA
Since workfare’s expansion in 1995, the Transit Authority expressed interest in using WEP workers as cleaners, without being required to expand its unionized hires. The use of WEP was used as a compromise bargaining position by the Transit Authority with the union: without an agreement to use WEP workers, the TA threatened to contract out cleaning work to low-paid, non-union cleaners.\textsuperscript{8} For a long time, Mayor Giuliani blocked the use of WEP workers in the transit system because denying the displacement of union workers was beyond the bounds of plausibility.\textsuperscript{9} Yet, again, at least partial—and likely full—displacement probably occurs even after the TA got the go-ahead to place WEP workers in the program.

In our survey of WEP workers in Transit jobs, fully 90.5 percent of the respondents report doing the same work as regular workers at their worksites. While we were unable to obtain a job description for the transit cleaner job title, our survey makes it clear that WEP workers do indeed “provide a cleaner quality of life to the rider.” Figure 7, below, summarizes the tasks transit WEP workers in the survey reported performing.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7.png}
\caption{Distribution of Tasks Performed by WEP Workers Across Transit Worksites}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Job Duties Performed}

As is the case in the other WEP assignments, training is rare in Transit Authority cleaning jobs. Just over 20 percent of the respondents claimed they received regular training, and less than 20


percent responded that they received training in health or safety or in the use of maintenance equipment.

Consistent with the findings in the rest of the survey, nearly three-quarters of the transit WEP workers claimed that they would prefer to get paid for the job they do (72.97%) while a quarter also said that they would like training for another job. Just over one-eighth each reported that they wanted WEP to count as real experience and to have their hours calculated by prevailing wages.

E. SOCIAL SERVICES AND SCHOOLS

One my main responsibilities are PRI’s, where I take down the names, the sex, the age, and the date of birth, what hospital they come from, whether or not they have any family contacts. That goes into the computer and once the clinical nurse looks over their score – cause all patients have a medical score – and once she looks over it and reviews it, it goes up to the medical department. Once they okay it then it comes back downstairs and then I do a summary, where you have to call the patient’s relatives and ask them certain questions. How long have they been in the hospital, do they suffer certain illness, stuff like that. And once the process is done we wait until the patient comes in. We do a face sheet on them where we just put down their information. Family contact, certain things that goes on a paper about a new resident coming in.

Vanessa, Nursing Home Workfare Worker

When asked about her tasks as an aide in a Brooklyn daycare center, one of the survey respondents wrote: “Daycare Provider: Assist in providing services to children, nurturing, loving, wiping, manners & behavior, caring, changing pampers, clothes, beginning pre-school trainings.” It is difficult to get a more comprehensive list—including caring and loving—for what it takes to be a good daycare provider. Indeed, this respondent—whose lengthy hours indicate that she must be a mother with more than one child on her budget—received no training for her WEP assignment and is performing the same work as a regularly paid employee.

Because of the lack of standardization of jobs in social services—especially in the nonprofit sector—our survey of WEP workers doing jobs in this area were not drawn from union job descriptions. Respondents worked primarily in daycare and senior care facilities, though one did domestic violence crisis intervention, and another performed clerical duties at a CUNY College.

The WEP workers in nonprofits and schools worked longer hours than WEP workers in any of the other categories. Ten of nineteen respondents in these jobs worked at least 70 hours every two weeks (full time), six worked at least 48 hours, and two worked 35 hours every two weeks.
These figures suggest that the vast majority of WEP workers in these positions are mothers with children in the TANF program.

Five of the nineteen respondents in nonprofits or colleges reported doing clerical work. The rest were teacher’s aides (n=10) and helpers in senior citizens’ homes (n=2). Teacher’s aides also sometimes doubled as kitchen helpers, and senior’s aides carried out a range of tasks, including serving lunch, grooming them, and “muchas cosas mas,” as one respondent put it. One respondent was a support worker with women with domestic violence crises.

In addition to the teacher’s aides in the daycare centers, where duties included reading to children, putting them to sleep, and serving lunches and snacks, twelve respondents were teacher’s aides in public schools. Eleven of these as well as two others (one who worked as a cafeteria aide) and the other who did not specify her jobs worked full time. A majority of the respondents had worked in their public school placements for a year or more.

All but three respondents reported that they would like to get paid for the work they do.

As far back as December 1994, before the large expansion of WEP, the Mayor courted the support of the union representing school aides and cafeteria workers in the public schools for the WEP program. That local threw its support behind the program, and began a training program meant to channel WEP workers into job vacancies with union benefits.\textsuperscript{10} However, that program is no longer in existence. While nine of thirteen respondents to the question about receiving regular training at the worksite reported doing so, most reported that they were trained in how to discipline children and how to care for them on the job.

As in the rest of the worksites, WEP workers in nonprofit organizations and public schools provide needed services to city residents, in some cases, working full-time. Especially for those working full-time, who also have dependent children on their welfare budgets, it is difficult to see how WEP—which provides little sustained training and below-poverty compensation—does anything but trap people in desperate situations.

\section*{IV. New York City’s WORKFARE PROGRAM IS DISPLACING WORKERS}

\textit{There were 6 or 7 WEP workers in City Hall. There were some city workers, a secretary did the same things that we did, she was a secretary to the supervisor we worked as a team, WEP workers and paid workers, worked as a team we were all important. The secretary did the same thing as us, answer phones, file complaints.}

\textit{Lynn City Hall}

In 1997, in response to increasing concerns among New York City’s public sector unions, the New York State Legislature passed changes to the Social Services Law that protect unionized

municipal workers against being displaced by public assistance recipients. This displacement includes both full and partial displacement. Full displacement occurs when a workfare worker simply takes the job of a union worker. Partial displacement occurs when workfare workers do work that is normally done by a union worker. The relevant section of the law reads as follows:

A recipient may be assigned to participate in such work experience program only if...(c) such assignment would not result in (iv) the performance, by such participant, of a substantial portion of the work ordinarily and actually performed by regular employees; or (v) the loss of a bargaining unit position as a result of work experience participants performing, in part or in whole, the work normally performed by the employee in such position (New York State Social Services Law, Section 336 (c) (2), emphasis added).

Our survey showed that this was happening. In order to most find out what work these workers were doing, we used job descriptions from entry-level job titles in each of these positions. We found that WEP workers performed thirty-five of the thirty-six tasks in the three job titles. Some WEP workers in each category also supervised other WEP workers. In some cases, WEP workers did other work beyond those in the entry-level job titles, perhaps taking work from workers in other job categories as well.

Clearly WEP workers are doing work done by regular municipal workers. Even if one assumes that City workers do all the tasks in their job descriptions—and such an assumption is probably unwarranted because few workers do every task in their respective job descriptions—the average WEP worker still takes away over one-third (36.7%) of the work done by similarly situated unionized workers.

Unsurprisingly, 86 percent of the respondents to the survey, in all job categories, reported that they perceive themselves to be doing the same work as municipal employees at their worksites.

V. WORKFARE’S PUBLIC SECTOR WORKFORCE: SWEATSHOP ON THE HUDSON

I do the same things as the paid secretary who works at my workfare assignment. We are both answering the phones, looking in the computer for residents, doing the face sheets, making up the residents cards that we have to file, making up the tags that go around the resident’s wrist. So basically I’m doing her job but not getting paid for it. The workers, they get paid every Thursday. You know I’m not there when they get paid, but just knowing that they get a paycheck every Thursday, it’s hard, knowing they get paid and I am not. I believe that if we are able to come in and do the jobs as workers, then I think that we need to get paid for it. Starting salary, entry level as always. But I think that we need to get paid according to our job description. We do the job of paid workers why should we not get paid for it.

Vanessa, Non-profit Workfare Worker
A. The Financial Incentive's for New York City to Replace Union Workers with Workfare Workers

There are clear incentives to use workfare workers instead of decently paid union workers. Indeed, the widespread use of workfare may be seen in light of other cost-saving labor strategies on the part of this administration, such as the growth in the use of per-diem employees. Yet, WEP workers are a particularly good source of cheap labor because the City does not bear the full cost for their work. For welfare recipients with no dependent children, the City pays half of the cost of their benefits, not including food stamps (which are a federal program), sharing the cost with the State. For those with dependent children, the City pays only a quarter of the cost of welfare benefits, with half being borne by the federal government and another quarter being borne by the State. The workfare caseload is nearly evenly split among those with and without dependent children (52% and 48%, respectively).

We have already established that WEP workers do much of the same work as entry-level municipal employees, at least in parks, maintenance, and clerical positions. If we compare the cost to the City for an hour of workfare workers' labor to that of a union employee's work, the incentives to displace the latter—even if illegally—are clear.

WEP workers in the survey worked an average of 44.31 hours every two weeks. The number of hours depends on the level of benefits received and to what other requirements for participation in job-search activities WEP workers are subject. WEP workers in our survey reported working from six to seventy hours every two weeks.

The cost to the City for an hour of WEP workers' work, based on this average number of hours, is merely $1.80.\(^\text{11}\) Table 4 compares the hourly cost of a WEP workers' work with that of comparable City workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Amount per hour</th>
<th>Annual Cost to the City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEP Worker</td>
<td>$1.80 per hour</td>
<td>2,073.71 per year (actual)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,600 (based upon a 40-hour work week, 50 weeks per year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Custodial Assistant</td>
<td>$10.20 per hour**</td>
<td>20,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Aide</td>
<td>$9.38 per hour**</td>
<td>18,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Park Worker</td>
<td>$11.01 per hour**</td>
<td>22,011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(*\text{per hour*average number of hours worked per two weeks*26)}\)
\(\text{**based upon working 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year.}\)

While the City has certainly improved its services in many agencies, this improvement has to be seen in the light of labor practices that are both apparently illegal and unfair. And while the

\(^{11}\) The formula by which this figure was reached appears in the appendix. It is worth noting that the figure is nearly identical to previous estimate made by Ken Peres of the Communications Workers of America on November 20, 1996 (Annette Fuentes "Gianinti's Workfare, Slaves of New York" (see In These Times December 23rd 1996).
City administration argues that displacement has not occurred because WEP was expanded after major cuts in agency staff, available evidence of staffing levels in City agencies with many WEP workers (including the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, and the Human Resources Administration) shows a continuing decline in headcount since WEP's expansion in 1995.

If the City can continue to pay WEP workers so little to perform work otherwise done by decently paid municipal employees, why should it do otherwise? Because the administration should not be in the business of promoting sweatshop conditions in work that benefits our entire city. While cleaner parks, cleaner streets, and more efficiently run City agencies benefit everyone, promote tourism and business, these should not mask the lack of "reciprocity" and "dignity" that characterize WEP. Both WEP workers and union, unionized workers pay a high price for substituting below-poverty jobs for decent ones.

### B. New York City's Workfare Program: Keeping Workers Living Below Poverty

WEP workers do valuable work for their fellow New Yorkers. We have found that they perform almost every one of the tasks in three categories of City worker job description, and more. Yet, by getting only the welfare grant in return, they are kept in poverty.

It is well known that welfare grants do not bring recipients to anything near the federal poverty level. For example, the annual maximum benefits—including food stamps—for a single adult receiving welfare (with no dependent children) in New York total $5,724. For single parents with two children (the average parent on welfare) the total rises to $10,344. Residents of homeless shelters get less, and actual benefits for all vary.

Welfare benefits have not been raised since 1990. The value of Aid to Dependent Children (now called Family Assistance) has declined in constant dollars since 1975 so that a grant that actually lifted families above the poverty level twenty-five years ago sinks them to between 63 and 77 percent of the poverty level today, depending on household size. Moreover, today workfare workers are working for their grants in what could be the labor market. But the City is keeping WEP workers' labor apart from labor market mechanisms and artificially driving down the price of labor. Table 5 compares maximum annualized Safety Net Assistance (the welfare program for people without dependent children) and Family Assistance grants (with food stamp budgets) with the poverty level for households of comparable size, and then compares these with unionized municipal workers' salaries in each of the categories used in the survey.

As we can see, in all three categories of union labor—regardless of family size (up to a single adult and three children)—salaries are kept above the poverty level, while in no case is the welfare benefit at that level, in spite of the fact that the two do substantially the same work.
Table 5. Poverty Thresholds by Family Size Compared with Maximum Welfare Grants by Family Size (Percent Poverty Threshold) and Unionized Municipal Worker Salaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty Threshold (1991)</th>
<th>Welfare Program Plus Food Stamps</th>
<th>City Worker Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$8,667 1 person</td>
<td>Safety Net, 1 person,</td>
<td>City Parks Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$5,478 (63.21%)</td>
<td>$22,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$11,483 1 adult, 1 child</td>
<td>Family Assistance, 1 adult, 1</td>
<td>Custodian Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>child, $8,220</td>
<td>$20,353</td>
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<td>$13,423 1 adult, 2</td>
<td>Family Assistance, 1 adult, 2</td>
<td>Clerical Aide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>children, $10</td>
<td>$18,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$16,954 1 adult, 3</td>
<td>Family Assistance, 1 adult, 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>children, $12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, as a previous report on a survey of nearly 500 welfare workers by Community Voices Heard showed, WEP jobs are, by and large, dead-end propositions. Where people move off of WEP, they do so generally of their own initiative, and not because WEP has facilitated this process at all. Moreover, dissatisfaction with the program grows among WEP workers the longer they remain in it.

The average length of time in a given worksite at the time of the present survey was nearly 35 (34.93) weeks. This suggests that little is being done to help move welfare workers expeditiously into jobs that can support them. Perhaps some of these jobs need to be created in the very sectors within which WEP workers currently work.

VI. TRAINING:

While it is clear that many of the jobs done by WEP workers require generally low skill levels, it is wrong to assume either that the jobs are therefore not valuable or that WEP workers are "trainees." In fact, a distinct minority (24.76%) of the respondents to the survey reported getting any regular training on the job. Many reported not getting the required health and safety training or other training (17.19%) pertinent to the jobs they did. Even among those

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12 A City Parks Worker's annual salary, by contrast brings him or her to 253.96% of the poverty level if single, and to 191.68%, 163.98%, 129.83 if he or she is supporting a family with one, two, or three children, respectively, on his or her own. The equivalent numbers for a Custodian Assistant are 234.83%, 177.24%, 132.05%, 120.05%, and for a Clerical Aide, 216.42%, 163.35%, 139.74%, 110.63%.
14 Where respondents answered in months, we used four-week months, thus likely generating a conservative estimate. A tabular summary of the average number of weeks by type of job appears in the appendix.
15 Some respondents reported getting health and safety training, but no regular training. Of those reporting getting regular training, most did not respond to more specific questions about content (health and safety, equipment, etc.).
who reported getting regular training, many could not be or were not specific about its content (84.28%).

VII. WHAT WORKFARE WORKERS WANT

Workfare workers perform a wide variety of tasks, in many different settings. Respondents to the survey work in parks and subways, in museums and on the street, making sure that these public facilities stay as clean as possible. They work in daycare centers and schools as school aides and cafeteria workers. They process and file forms in welfare offices, in the Housing Authority and Department of Housing Preservation and Development, insuring that applications for housing and other services are properly handled.

The clear majority of survey respondents, when asked which they would prefer, to be paid for the work they do (73.36%), to have WEP count as “real experience” they can put on a résumé (19.26%), have their hours calculated by prevailing wages for the work they do (resulting in fewer hours) (24.59%), or getting training for another job (20.98%), answered that they would like to be paid for the work they do.
Edwin Parks and Recreation Department
WEP Worker, Central Park, Summer Stage,
Jackie Robinson Park

I have been working in New York City's Work Experience Program for over 7 years. One of my first jobs was at the Central Park Summer Stage, I would work from 9:30 in the morning until 11:30 at night. I was cleaning up the area, raking, wetting the ground, and picking up leaves and all kinds of garbage. Then set up the chairs, help the people from the stage put up the speakers, these speakers were 250-pound speakers, and the workfare workers would do all this. We would put the gates up, fix the snow fences, sometimes we have to stay watching that nobody comes near the stage, we were like security guards.

After the show was finished we had to pick up, so much garbage, we need back up from another place, well there was nobody available no more city workers, so that night we worked, only about seven workfare workers, it was 11:30 at night when the show finished, but we had to stay to rake, to put away the chairs, take out the garbage, help the sanitation department, help them to collect the garbage. We did not leave until 3:30 in the morning.

At Jackie Robinson Park the first thing in the morning I do is pick up the keys to the shed then plastic bags, if I need anything, tools like a shovel, I pick up these things or whatever that I need, I just ask one of the supervisors in the office I need this, I need that. I maintain the playgrounds, basketball courts, and baseball fields, sweep, rake and pick up hazardous materials and check equipment in the morning, for example if there is a problem with a swing or playground equipment, I write a report and give it to my supervisor.

"I love to work, but I don't want to work for free. I was reading in the paper that the parks are the cleanest they have been for a long time and then in it said thanks to WEP workers. I look at it and it made me cry for joy that I say yes, we doing a good job. But what about our paycheck? "

Edwin
Tyletha, Clerical WEP Worker.
Medicaid Office 34th St. Manhattan
and Concourse Job Center, Bronx

I'm Tyletha a mother of two and I have worked in the WEP program as a clerical and office aide staff person for over one year. I am currently working at the Medicaid Office on 34th St. in Manhattan and I have worked at a welfare center in the Bronx.

I used to work for a Concourse Job Center where I was using the computer to pull up case logging files, making out files and sending them downtown for people who had fair hearings and answering phone calls and doing other office work as needed. I would be responsible for getting case records downtown.

Now at the Medicaid Office on 34th St., I am working as a receptionist assisting people with questions, and directing people where they have to go. People have to stop at my desk and check in before they are directed to where they should go. Most of the other WEP workers there are doing filing, making copies and doing other office work. Many are filling out files, putting names and case numbers on them before they are sent out.

Workfare workers are working hard. At Medicaid, there's a workfare worker, working for four years. She can do everything a regular worker does. If you come in with a broken Medicaid card she can get you a temporary one. She knows all the ins and outs, and yet she has never gotten a job. And at the Concourse Job center, Richard, a workfare worker, for five years, runs the record room. He is the record room, you need a record you call Richard.

"At the Concourse Job Center I was doing what the supervisors were doing because I could do a lot of the work. When they had to get records downtown, I would do interviews, I would pull case files up on the computer too. Whenever there was a backlog or a rush then it would be Tyletha come help me."

Tyletha
Armando, WEP Worker
Department of Parks and Recreation, Crotona Park

I work at Crotona Park in the Bronx, in the boat house. My duties there are to make sure the benches in the park don’t have any graffiti on them, the roadways are clean, to pick up all the garbage that is left over from the day before, and to make sure all the playgrounds are in good condition. And generally speaking, we do mostly everything there.

You shovel when it’s necessary, when it has rained; in the winter time when it snows. Those are hard working days. We spread salt all around the sidewalks of the park, the roadways. Make sure everything is clear so people don’t have any accidents. It’s very busy in the winter time. We do some jobs that are really not meant for us to do, like carrying heavy things, cutting down certain branches of the trees. Sometimes it’s dangerous. Anything in high places like the handball courts. Like big walls and you have to use step ladders for that.

People they just have to tell us, “Hey, you’re doing a very good job. ‘cause we make this park clean.” ... The day care workers they tell us, “Hey, you’re doing a good job here. This is marvelous. It looks clean.” So, there are a lot of workers that really perform to the utmost doing their job. And the park is now – as a matter of fact is cleaner. In two years I’ve been there, there’s a big change. So, different than the way it was before. It’s so clean now. It’s up to date. Maintenance is up to date and it’s done really by the WEP workers. It’s not said by me. It’s said by people that frequent the park. They see the park. They said, “Since you’ve been working here, you WEP workers, this park has taken a big change.”
Lynn - WEP Worker Parks and Recreation - Department of Forestry, Mayor’s Community Action Center & Human Resource Administration.

I have been working in the workfare program as a WEP Workers for over a year and a half. My first work assignment was in Corona Queens, working for the Parks and Recreation - Department of Forestry.

At the Forestry Department I took calls about dangerous trees. I would file incident reports and answer inquiries about trees that were endangering the public, tree roots that had broken up sidewalks, dying trees that were close to falling, limbs that were hanging low, hornets nests, anything that was pertaining to danger or trees that needed to be pruned or roots that needed to be cut. I took the phone calls, processed the information and gave inspectors the claim to validate. I had to follow up with people, people would call you back with information about insurance, I would be looking up information and files for claims. WEP workers were answering the phones and gathering this information.

At the Mayor’s Action Center my job was similar. In fact I think they put me there because of my experience in Queens. There I would take complaints about broken hydrants, street repairs, bad landlords, crime, traffic problems, threatening people, etc. I was answering phones, doing incident reports, giving people information about everything parking violations, what to do about a busted sidewalk, etc. People would call to file complaints, and we would process them again. People would check things out then you would send people the findings. We would send out form letters, we would check the computer and the entries.

“...That was a job city workers used to do, then it was downsized, 6 workfare workers, responsible for all of Queens from Long Island city to Rockaway, we did it all. To make sure that people who live in Queens, were safe from dangerous trees. At the Mayor’s office WEP workers, were doing the same thing as the paid secretary.”

Lynn
Verdin Rosemin, Clerical WEP Worker Social Security Administration – Housing Division

I have been in the workfare program for a number of years. I have been at five different workfare assignments, including working at Harlem Hospital, a city office at 80 Washington St., an AIDS Hospice, a Senior Citizens Home, and Section 8 and Housing the Social Security Administration where I currently work. I have done real work at these jobs, I am a good worker, but I don’t get paid.

In the Bronx, I worked as a cook and food prep person for an AIDS Hospice. I would prepare food, cooked meals and served people with AIDS. I worked in the kitchen with 10 other workfare workers. There were only two paid workers in the kitchen, and we (workfare workers) would do the bulk of the work. When I first got there, food was delivered, one person would bring the food from the van, and we would prepare it, putting it into bags and on plates for the patients. Then we started cooking the food right there, and I would cook the food and clean the plates, pots and pans. We did all the work in the kitchen, show new people, people from workfare, where everything was, how to prepare food, and serve it.

Now I am working for Section 8, part of the Social Security Administration on 125th St. I work with 2-3 other workfare workers, sorting mail and delivering it to the proper people. We take the mail and sort it out by zip code, then we prepare the files for people dealing with housing issues. One of the workfare workers types in information and is responsible for printing out reports. There are other paid workers at the office, and they do the same work as us, filing, sorting mail and writing down information for the files, we just don’t get paid.

“Everything I do at a workfare assignment, a city worker does, or used to do. I am doing real work that needs to be done, not make up work. There is a need for the work that other workfare workers, and I do. We are doing it now, we should get paid with a real paycheck, get paid a living wage.”

Verdin
Marcos -- WEP Worker, Parks and Recreation Department

At my workfare job I clean bathrooms, basketball courts, sweep, mop, cut the grass, and take the garbage out. When the garbage truck arrives, I help load the trash. Also, when someone new arrives, I tell him or her what to do, how to do it, how to remove graffiti from the walls and from the benches, how to clean paint from the walls... I take care of the sprinklers, close them, open them; clean the aluminum swings and the soil around the trees. I have been there for five years, since January 30th of '95.

I arrive at 7:30. I always start before my time. I open my office, look for my schedule, punch in. After punching in I take a bag, the broom, the dustpan, a hook to remove glass. I take everything outside and go first to the street around the school and then inside where the children go. From there I go to the basketball courts. I open the bathroom, then I check it, sweep it, mop it. I clean the office, pick up glass - there should not be any glass there because that is were children play. After I do that I place it in the garbage bag, tie it, place it in the truck, it gets picked up and then, during the time I have left I keep checking that nothing is thrown out. If I see a piece of paper I pick it up, and then when the truck comes to pick up the garbage I bring whatever else I have.

They (city workers) only come from the city to supervise and fix little jobs that we can not do such as welding, cement, fix the sprinkler, and that kind of things that happen daily. There used to be three or four of us, but now for some reason that I am not aware it's just myself. I have already asked the supervisors why it is that they send three, four, six persons to other places and I am alone. Sometimes they have told me that they don't really need to supervise me because they never have a problem with me and know that I give 100% to my job, even though 50% is acceptable.

"Me and my park have won certificates for being the cleanest. There are people and teachers that have a park next to them but would rather walk four or five blocks to my park because it is safer and cleaner."

Marcos
A. Survey Design and Methods

The Count Our Work survey was designed by taking union job descriptions from four job titles and converting the duties listed within to questions on a questionnaire. Separate surveys were designed for WEP workers working in parks, in maintenance and janitorial positions, and clerical and office positions. For transit positions, a questionnaire was developed from smaller, pilot surveys. In addition to questions about job duties, there were questions regarding the number of hours worked, the number of weeks at the worksite, and whether the WEP worker thought she or he was doing the same work as regular employees. A separate survey—allowing more open, descriptive responses—was developed for WEP workers in nonprofit agencies and public schools. Finally, WEP workers were asked to say which of four options they preferred: 1) getting paid for the work they do; 2) having WEP count as real experience to which they could refer on a résumé; 3) having their hours calculated by prevailing wages for they work they do instead of by minimum wage; or 4) getting training for another job.

CVH staff, members, and summer interns visited worksites in the Bronx and Manhattan, surveying WEP workers individually. Surveyors made an effort to speak with everyone at the site at the time of the visit. Additional surveys were conducted by attending job-search sessions at social service agencies and by interviewing WEP workers there.

B. Equation for Per-Hour Cost to the City for WEP Work

NTANF=number of TANF recipients in WEP, June-October 1999=19,324
NSNA=number of SNA recipients in WEP, June-October 1999=17,825
STANF=maximum monthly grant for average TANF household with 3 persons=$577 (excluding food stamps, which do not cost the City)
SSNA=maximum monthly grant for SNA recipient=$352 (excluding food stamps, which do not cost the City)
MEANHR=mean number of hours worked by WEP workers in the survey every two weeks=43.105

\[
0.25 (\text{NTANF}(\frac{\text{STANF}}{\text{MEANHR}}))+0.5(\text{NSNA}(\frac{\text{SSNA}}{\text{MEANHR}}))
\]

\[
\text{NTANF} + \text{NSNA}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department/Job Type</th>
<th>N (reporting)</th>
<th>Mean Weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>61.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance and Janitorial</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>24.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and Office</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>18.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofits and Schools</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Calculation for Hourly City Cost for DPR WEP Workers' Work

DPR WEP workers are disproportionately Home Relief/Safety Net Assistance recipients (up to 90 percent according to some recent estimates). With the assumption—likely a conservative one, though more or less conforming to patterns in our data—that ninety percent of WEP workers in DPR are SNA recipients, we can calculate the average per-hour cost of WEP workers' work in the department to the City as

\[ 0.9 \times 0.5 \times (352)/(2(39.44)) + 0.1 \times 0.25 \times (577)/(2(39.44)) \]

where 0.9 and 0.1 are the proportion of WEP workers in each welfare program; where 0.5 and 0.25 are the share of the cost borne by the City for each of the welfare programs; where $352 and $577 are the amounts of the SNA welfare grant and the TANF welfare grant for the average TANF household (three persons); and 39.04 is the average number of hours worked by DPR WEP workers every two weeks (then multiplied by two).
VIII. WEP SITE PROFILES

Following is a list and description of some of the key sites and findings from those that we surveyed over the course of the survey period. This is not an exhaustive list and is compiled for a range of diversity of sites.

1. Crotona Park

Crotona Park lies in one of the poorest areas of the City. Community District Three is a predominantly African American and Latino area, with a median household income of only $10,487, according to the 1990 Census (Community District Statement of Needs, 1990: 69). In 1995, nearly half of the district’s residents were on either AFDC or Home Relief. Crotona Park, therefore, serves a very poor population. Nevertheless, it has been substantially improved, in spite of cutbacks in municipal worker headcount, over the past two years.

Thirty-two WEP workers in our survey work in Crotona Park. They work an average of 45 hours every two weeks. Many have been working in Crotona Park for well over a year, and over half have worked there for two years. This reflects a far slower rate of turnover in this park than in the overall sample. Crotona Park’s WEP workers appear to have been active in the recent renovations to the park. In contrast to the overall sample of DPR WEP workers, Crotona Park’s WEP workers did more mowing and hedging, sod-laying and hedge trimming, cultivating and fertilizing.

In 1999, Community District Three stated that it was “strongly opposed to personnel service reductions” in Crotona Park. The City appears to think that WEP workers, many of whom have been on the job for well over a year, are an appropriate substitute for a declining staff. Yet, let us imagine how much better it would be in this impoverished community if, instead of the S5748 most DPR WEP workers make per year, WEP workers making a clear, long-term contribution to the health of Crotona Park, were paid above poverty level in union jobs paying the same $22,011 as regular City Parks Workers.

2. Downtown Loop of Parks (Union Square, Washington Square, Tompkins Square)

In Union Square, Washington Square, and Tompkins Square Parks, one is likely to meet students, young dot-com entrepreneurs, farmers selling their produce to top city chefs, tourists, and shoppers taking in the bounty of downtown. The Greenmarket in Union Square, the weekend performances in Washington Square, and the revitalized Tompkins Square all serve as magnets for weekend and weekday leisure-seekers alike.

Eighteen of the WEP workers surveyed worked in this downtown loop of parks. WEP workers assigned to here keep the facilities clean for everyone to enjoy, and, at the time of the survey, had done so, on average, for over a year (58 weeks). WEP workers in these parks work an average of 35 hours every two weeks, and concentrate their activities in sweeping and raking litter, emptying garbage cans, and cleaning the restrooms.
3. Bronx Courthouse

Seventeen respondents to the survey worked in Maintenance and Janitorial positions at the Bronx Courthouse complex. WEP workers at the courthouse are worked hard. WEP workers here worked, on average, more hours than WEP workers in similar positions in other sites (averaging 47.2 hours every two weeks as against 42.4) and had been at the Bronx Courthouse complex for a longer time at the time of the survey (34 weeks as against 24). The WEP workers here reported doing 38 percent of the tasks in the union job description, concentrating their efforts in sweeping and mopping, emptying wastebaskets, cleaning bathrooms, vacuuming rugs and carpets, and replacing bathroom supplies (between 70 and 90 percent reported doing each of these tasks). In a busy courthouse, these tasks are indispensable. One need only imagine the indignity heaped upon the practice of law multiplied tenfold by the proliferation of filthy toilets and other facilities in the absence of these workers.

4. Delancey Street Subway Station – Transit Workfare Workers

WEP workers at Delancey Street work hard to keep our transit stations clean. The 15 survey respondents reported working 43 hours on average over a two-week period. Because WEP workers had only recently been placed in the transit stations, they reported working an average of only 4 weeks at this site. However, all the transit workers surveyed at Delancey Street reported doing the same work as regular paid employees. All reported emptying garbage cans and sweeping stairs and areas around the station. Nearly all reported cleaning, polishing and dusting. Moreover, 73 percent of Delancey Transit WEP workers reported defective equipment and half reported cleaning and disinfecting toilets.

5. Rider Center

At the Rider Avenue Center, a welfare office in the Bronx, WEP workers perform both maintenance and clerical tasks. Seven respondents to our survey reported doing maintenance tasks at Rider Center and twelve reported performing clerical duties. Both sets of WEP workers reported working an average of just over forty-seven hours every two weeks. Maintenance and janitorial WEP workers reported doing relatively few tasks in the regular City Custodial Assistant’s job description. Taken together, they reported doing only eight of sixteen listed tasks, and averaged doing just less than one-fifth of the listed tasks (19.6%). Most reported emptying garbage cans and cleaning bathrooms, and three of the seven respondents reported sweeping and mopping. At the same time, five of the seven (83.3%) reported doing the same work as regular maintenance employees. This raises the question of how much of a priority for the City it is to keep a neighborhood welfare center clean.

WEP workers performing clerical duties at Rider Center reported doing 46.7 percent of the tasks in the Clerical Assistant’s job description, and seventy-five percent reported doing the same work as the regular workers at the site. Seventy-five or more percent of Clerical and Office WEP workers at Rider reported keeping and filing records, and acting as receptionists and answering phones. More than half deliver mail, and slightly under half prepare mailings and type and word-process. Rider Center Clerical and Office WEP workers were more likely
than Clerical WEP workers overall to want to be paid for the work they do (75%), though they also wanted training (25%) and for their hours to be calculated using prevailing wages for the work they do (25%). This is perhaps not surprising because they carry out a considerable amount of the business done by Rider Center.

6. **Museo del Barrio**

El Museo del Barrio is East Harlem’s premier cultural institution. Founded in 1969 by neighborhood parents, educators, artists and activists, the museum has played an important role in the cultural and political life of the Puerto Rican community in New York. While this community link remains strong, fully forty percent of the museum’s visitors are now non-Latino, and the museum has taken its place among the City’s important cultural and tourist attractions on the “Museum Mile” stretching for over 30 blocks on Fifth Avenue.

Six Maintenance and Janitorial WEP workers reported working at el Museo del Barrio in our survey. All reported sweeping and mopping and cleaning bathrooms, and most emptied wastebaskets, replaced bathroom supplies, and cleaned mirrors and glass. Four of the six also operated elevators. All reported doing the same work as regular maintenance employees at el Museo del Barrio, and not a single WEP worker reported getting any training whatsoever.

Like the city’s parks, el Museo del Barrio is a jewel in the City’s crown. And like the parks, the jewel is kept shining, at least in part, by the labor of WEP workers. All the survey respondents at el Museo del Barrio would prefer to get paid for the work they do. It is ironic indeed that el Museo, founded by activists interested in educating and improving their neighborhood should be kept clean by labor that is forced, untrained, underpaid, and which undermines labor standards for other workers.

7. **NYC Court House - 60 Centre Street**

WEP workers keep 60 Centre Street, a courthouse in Manhattan clean for all comers. Sixteen respondents to our survey worked in the courthouse, doing maintenance tasks. WEP workers at this site reported doing nearly half (45.3 percent) of the jobs in the job description for unionized maintenance workers. All swept and mopped, and cleaned bathrooms. Three quarters or more of the WEP workers here replaced emptied wastebaskets and cleaned mirrors and glass, and over half of the respondents also vacuumed rugs and carpets, dusted and cleaned blinds, polished furniture and metalwork, and replaced bathroom supplies.

All the respondents at this site said that they did the same work as the regular workers at 60 Centre Street. Over three-quarters of the respondents (81.3%) at this site said that they would like to get paid for the work they did.

8. **Office of Employment Services Human Resource Administration-Clerical**

Twenty-seven of the respondents to the survey reported performing Clerical and Office duties at the Office of Employment Services, the division of the Human Resources Administration that administers WEP. The survey respondents working at OES reported doing less than
twenty percent (18.9%) of the tasks in the job descriptions of unionized clerical workers at that office. Yet, nearly 90 percent (88.5%) reported doing the “same work” as those regular employees. The vast majority of WEP workers reported filing records (74%), while large minorities of respondents reported keeping records and answering phones (37% and 25.9% respectively).

It is perhaps appropriate that a WEP placement at OES—while not too onerous by some accounts—also represents the general approach used by the City in the workfare program. WEP workers’ labor is used to fill a great need—in this case, filing in the busy workfare headquarters—while little attention is paid to getting people back into the workforce on a better footing than they had had previously. Just over a quarter of the respondents here (25.9%) reported getting regular training. Just over ten percent reported getting health and safety training, and 18.5 percent reported getting training in the use of office equipment. Not a single respondent reported getting trained in the use of computers. It is perhaps not surprising that only half—as opposed to 63.5% overall—of the WEP workers here reported wanting to get paid for the job they do; they are recognizably dead-end propositions. Over a quarter wanted increased job training, and the same number (26.9%) wanted their hours calculated by prevailing wages for the work they did. These figures are slightly higher than they are for Clerical and Office WEP workers in general.


The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) is the city agency in charge of overseeing the reconstruction and preservation of New York’s neighborhoods. HPD, based at 100 Gold Street in Lower Manhattan, prepares redevelopment plans and reports on the City’s housing stock, monitors conditions in privately owned housing, carries out inspections, and is meant to hold landlords accountable for their housing. HPD also works closely with non-profit and private, for-profit developers, and with tenants, seeking ways to preserve affordable housing opportunities to New Yorkers.

Twenty of the respondents to our survey carried out their WEP assignments in Clerical and Office positions at HPD. On average, these workers perform 44 percent of the tasks in the Clerical Assistant’s job description. Sixty percent or more of the WEP workers here answer phones, keep records and files. And while one-fifth (four of twenty) and one-quarter (five of twenty respondents) reported actually processing forms and supervising other WEP workers’ work, over a third of the respondents reported doing each of the other tasks in the job descriptions.

Keeping in mind that welfare keeps recipients below the poverty line, and that a population of poor tenants is one of the primary predictors of housing decline, it is ironic that HPD’s newest workforce is being kept by City policy from earning a decent wage for the valuable work they are doing in keeping the agency running. Eighty-five percent of the WEP workers at HPD report that they do the same work as the regular clerical employees.

Moreover, the City could create transitional jobs so that the WEP workers here could earn a decent living somewhere else. While a majority of these WEP workers reported getting
training (60 percent, with 35 percent reporting having received training in office equipment use, and 25 percent each reporting getting some training on health and safety and computers), they also saw inequity in the way they were treated. Two-thirds wanted to get paid for the work they did, eight of twenty respondents thought their hours should be set by the wage other workers were paid for doing the same work, and seven wanted training they could use to find another job. Clearly, the training component at 100 Gold Street is working better than in many other sites; but many WEP workers realize that until they get decent jobs with the possibility of further training, they will be stuck in poverty.
Community Voices Heard
PARKS & RECREATION WEP WORKER INVOICE
To the City of New York

Thank you for voluntarily taking a few minutes to complete this survey. Your participation is very important—we need to let everyone know that WEP workers are doing REAL work and deserve to get paid for it. All of the information gathered here will remain completely confidential, anonymous and will not be given to any welfare office. If there are any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, feel free to skip them. If you’re interested in finding out more about CVH, please fill out a CVH Action Pledge and we’ll put you on the mailing list. Thanks so much for your participation and support!

Current WEP site & Location: __________________________

# of HOURS (Every two weeks): ________________________
# of WEEKS at this site: ____________________________

Below is a list of the duties of a CITY PARK WORKER ($22,011 annual salary).

Please check which duties you have performed:

_____ mow lawn or edging
_____ refuse collection & disposal
_____ cultivating or fertilizing
_____ sod laying and hedge trimming
_____ sweeping or raking of litter

_____ emptying garbage cans
_____ clean & maintain restrooms
_____ safety checks of facilities & equipment
_____ minor repair work
_____ supervise WEP workers

OTHER (please list):

Do you do the same work as the regular paid employees at your worksite? _____ YES _____ NO

Do you receive REGULAR TRAINING? _____ YES _____ NO If YES, I get trained on the following:

_____ Health and Safety in the Workplace
_____ Parks & Recreation Equipment Use

OTHER:

Please tell us how much you receive in benefits (per month):
Cash: _____ Food Stamps: _____ Rent: _____ Utilities: _____ Other: _____

Which of the following statements best reflects what is MOST important for you?

_____ I’d like to be paid as a regular worker at my worksite instead of being a WEP worker there
_____ I want my WEP experience to count as real work experience
_____ I think that my WEP hours should be calculated by what people really get paid, instead of by minimum wage
_____ I want training and experience at my WEP site that will make me more ready for a job somewhere

Please tell us about OTHER WEP sites you have worked at:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other WEP Sites</th>
<th># Hours</th>
<th># Weeks</th>
<th>Duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

NAME: (Optional) ________________________________
Thank you for voluntarily taking a few minutes to complete this survey. Your participation is very important—we need to let everyone know that WEP workers are doing REAL work and deserve to get paid for it. All of the information gathered here will remain completely confidential, anonymous and will not be given to any welfare office. If there are any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, feel free to skip them. If you’re interested in finding out more about CVH, please fill out a CVH Action Pledge and we’ll put you on the mailing list. Thanks so much for your participation and support!

Current WEP site & Location: ____________________________________________

# of HOURS (Every two weeks): ____________________ # of WEEKS at this site: ____________

Below is a list of the duties of a TRANSIT WORKER:
Please check which duties you have performed:

_____ clean & polish surfaces  
_____ empty garbage cans  
_____ clean & disinfect toilets  
_____ replace restroom supplies  
_____ report dangerous conditions  
_____ remove graffiti and stickers  
_____ clean field or WEP office  

_____ report defective equipment  
_____ scrape platforms, mezzanines, etc.  
_____ dust handrails, turnstiles, iron railings, etc.  
_____ sweep stairs and street areas leading to station  
_____ remove gum from floor  
_____ clean abandoned areas  

**OTHER** (please list):

Do you do the same work as the regular paid employees at your worksite? _____ YES  _____ NO

Do you receive REGULAR TRAINING? _____ YES  _____ NO  If YES, I get trained on the following:

_____ Health and Safety in the Workplace  

_____ Transit Equipment Use

**OTHER:**

Please tell us how much you receive in benefits (per month):

Cash: _____ Food Stamps: _____ Rent: _____ Utilities: _____ Other: _____

Which of the following statements best reflects what is MOST important for you?

_____ I’d like to be paid as a regular worker at my worksite instead of being a WEP worker there

_____ I want my WEP experience to count as real work experience

_____ I think that my WEP hours should be calculated by what people really get paid, instead of by minimum wage

_____ I want training and experience at my WEP site that will make me more ready for a job somewhere

Please tell us about OTHER WEP sites you have worked at:

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NAME: (Optional)

Current WEP site: ____________________________________________
   Location: _____________________________________________

# of HOURS (Every two weeks): ___________________  # of WEEKS at this site: _________________

DUTIES: (Please describe in detail)

Do you supervise WEP workers? _____ YES _____ NO
Are you doing the SAME WORK as paid employees? _____ YES _____ NO  Please give EXAMPLES.

Do you receive REGULAR TRAINING? _____ YES _____ NO  What do you get trained on?

What title best describes what you do at your WEP site?
   ____ Clerical Worker ($7.50-9.00/hr)
   ____ Health/Hospital Aide ($8.00-12.00/hr)
   ____ Kitchen Aide ($7.00-10.50/hr)
   ____ Sanitation Worker ($10.00-16.00/hr)
   ____ Janitorial Worker ($6.75-12.00/hr)
   ____ Home Attendant ($8.00-18.00/hr)

Please tell us how much you receive in benefits (per month):
   Cash: _____  Food Stamps: _____  Rent: _____  Utilities: _____  Other: _____

Which of the statements below reflect what is MOST important to you?
   _____ I’d like to be paid as a regular worker at my worksite instead of being a WEP worker there
   _____ I want my WEP experience to count as real work experience
   _____ I think that my WEP hours should be calculated by what people really get paid, instead of by minimum wage
   _____ I want training and experience at my WEP site that will make me more ready for a job somewhere

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Current WEP site & Location: _______________________________

# of HOURS (Every two weeks): __________________________ # of WEEKS at this site: __________________________

Below is a list of the duties of a CITY CUSTODIAL ASSISTANT ($20,353 annual salary):

- sweep & mop floors
- clean bathroom
- wash walls
- scrub, wax and polish floor
- hand scrub stairs and landings
- empty wastebaskets
- vacuum rugs and carpets
- replace bulbs and fuses
- dust and clean blinds
- polish furniture & metal work
- clean mirrors and glass
- wash electric light fixtures
- replace bathroom supplies
- sweep or wash sidewalks
- operate elevators
- supervise WEP workers

OTHER (please list):

Do you do the same work as the regular paid employees at your worksite? ______ YES ______ NO

Do you receive REGULAR TRAINING? ______ YES ______ NO  If YES, I get trained on the following:

- Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Maintenance Equipment Use

OTHER:

Please tell us how much you receive in benefits (per month):
Cash: ______  Food Stamps: ______  Rent: ______  Utilities: ______  Other: ______

Which of the following statements best reflects what is MOST important for you?

- I’d like to be paid as a regular worker at my worksite instead of being a WEP worker there
- I want my WEP experience to count as real work experience
- I think that my WEP hours should be calculated by what people really get paid, instead of by minimum wage
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Current WEP site & Location: ____________________________________________________________

# of HOURS (Every two weeks): _____________________ # of WEEKS at this site: ____________

Below is a list of the duties of a CLERICAL AIDE ($18,757 annual salary).
Please check which duties you have performed:

_____ receive or deliver mail/packages
_____ file records or other materials
_____ give directions to clients
_____ prepare & issue mailings
_____ type or word process

OTHER (please list): ____________________________________________________________

Do you do the same work as the regular paid employees at your worksite? ______ YES ______ NO

Do you receive REGULAR TRAINING? _____ YES ______ NO If YES, I get trained on the following:

_____ Health and Safety in the Workplace
_____ Office Equipment Use

OTHER: _______________________________________________________________

Please tell us how much you receive in benefits (per month):
Cash: _____ Food Stamps: _____ Rent: _____ Utilities: _____ Other: _____

Which of the following statements best reflects what is MOST important for you?

_____ I’d like to be paid as a regular worker at my worksite instead of being a WEP worker there

_____ I want my WEP experience to count as real work experience

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