ANALYSIS OF WORKING CONDITIONS AND SEXUAL THREATS AGAINST HOTEL WORKERS IN OAKLAND

October 2, 2018
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hotel housekeepers, who are predominantly women of color, work in private spaces — including men’s hotel rooms. Over the course of August 2018, EBASE and Unite Here Local 2850 conducted two surveys of union and non-union hotel workers in Oakland, California. The first survey focused on the behavior of guests and management towards the workers. The second survey centered on working conditions, average workloads and breaks. Together, these two surveys paint a picture of a workforce that is frequently subjected to sexually threatening behavior while managing backbreaking workloads that leave them exhausted and unable to fully participate in family and community life.

KEY FINDINGS

• More than half of the women surveyed had experienced a guest opening the door naked or exposing himself.

• 1 in 4 said guests had said or done something to make them feel unsafe.

• 101 incidents of flashing or exposure to nudity were reported by the 102 survey respondents.

• 68% reported having trouble sleeping through the night.
INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is growing rapidly as capital investment and tourism flood into Oakland and the East Bay, driving up demand for hotels and restaurants. Several new and remodeled hotels are underway downtown and on the airport corridor. Looking forward, 10 new hotels are somewhere in the development pipeline in Oakland, from the pre-application stage to under construction.

At the same time, women across the country are standing up and speaking out about workplace sexual assault, fair pay and the impact of ‘everyday sexism.’ At the nexus of this economic boom and the #TimesUp movement are Oakland’s hotel workers, who contribute to the success of the city and their employers, but for whom on-the-job assault and threats, wage theft, and workload increases are ongoing issues. To understand the scope of the problem, EBASE joined together with Unite Here Local 2850 to survey these workers on their experiences. The findings of those surveys are outlined here.

“I’m just one of the many women who work in Oakland’s hotels. We live in fear and shame of guests exposing themselves to us — or worse — when we enter to clean their room or bring them food. It’s embarrassing and humiliating. These hotel guests take away our dignity and threaten our safety, but our manager just tells us to keep quiet; that the guests come first.”

– Blanca Smith, Oakland hotel worker
WIDESPREAD SEXUAL ASSAULT AND THREATS

Unite Here Local 2850 and EBASE collected 102 surveys from union and non-union workers about guest behavior. 97 of these surveys were from housekeepers and room-service servers who answered with the following:

INCIDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>51% said they had experienced a guest opening the door naked or exposing himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25% said guests had said or done something to make them feel unsafe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the hotel workers who completed the survey reported:

- 101 incidents of flashing or exposure to nudity
- 52 incidents of unwanted sexually suggestive looks, gestures, sexual comments, jokes, or questions
- 18 incidents of guests pressuring them for a date or sexual favors
- 15 incidents in which a guest cornered them or blocked or tried to block them from leaving the room
- 18 incidents in which a guest touched or tried to touch them in an unwelcome way (such as kissing, grabbing, pinching, patting, groping, etc.)

Here’s what hotel workers said about management’s responses to their concerns:

- “Solamente se rió.” (They just laughed.)
- “Ninguna. Ellos lo ven como muy normal.” (Nothing. They see it as very normal.)
- “He is a regular guest and is known for doing it often.”
DIFFICULT WORKING CONDITIONS

Housekeeping is physically exhausting and requires lifting heavy mattresses, moving heavy furniture, and laboring on hands and knees to clean floors and tubs. At some hotels, workers are forced to clean more than 20 rooms per day. Unite Here Local 2850 and EBASE conducted a survey among union and non-union hotel housekeepers in Oakland about their workload. Of the 98 housekeepers who answered the survey:

**MISSING BREAKS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>76%</th>
<th>76% SAID THEY DO NOT ALWAYS TAKE THEIR BREAKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One 30 minute break and two ten minute breaks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 56% | 56% SAID THEY SKIP BREAKS MORE THAN ONCE PER WEEK. |

**INCREASED WORKLOAD**

| 60% | 60% SAID THEIR WORKLOAD HAD INCREASED OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS. |

| 68% | 68% REPORTED HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING THROUGH THE NIGHT. |

“We are Oakland hotel workers. We love this city and we work hard. But too often we are put in danger at work.”

– Irma Pérez, Oakland hotel worker
SUMMARY

Oakland’s hotel workers continue to work under dangerous and difficult conditions, and unresponsive management leaves these women with very few options. They report sexual assault, threats, and inappropriate sexual behavior by hotel guests at alarming rates. In addition, they report increasing workloads and regularly missing breaks. The working conditions these women labor under present significant challenges for them, and for Oakland, as these residents are not able to fully participate in their communities.

The East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) advances economic, racial, and social justice by building a just economy in the East Bay based on good jobs and healthy communities. We address the root causes of economic injustice by developing strategic alliances among community, labor, and people of faith to build power and create change with low-income workers and communities of color.

UNITE HERE! Local 2850 is the East and North Bay’s Union for hotel, foodservice, and gaming workers. Local 2850 represents workers in hotels, airport concessions, gaming, and food service. UNITE HERE! boasts a diverse membership, comprising workers from many immigrant communities. The majority of UNITE HERE! members are women.

Paid for by Times Up Oakland: Yes on Measure Z, Committee for Fair Workplaces & Ending Sexual Assault on the Job. Committee major funding from:

UNITE HERE Local 2850

M. Quinn Delaney

East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy