

ITEM #26

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL
Public Hearing

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COUNTY ADMINISTRATION



Miami Herald



American Airlines workers in Miami making below living wage

Miami-Dade commissioners approved a living wage for airport workers. But exemptions in the rule mean thousands of workers, including many for American Airlines, are still making less than \$13 an hour.

By Carl Juste

TOURISM & CRUISES

Miami approved MIA workers' living wage. So why are many still making below minimum?

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Miami International Airport worker Maria Sánchez, 57, felt hopeful when Miami-Dade County commissioners extended the living-wage ordinance to shops, restaurants and other vendors at the airport in July. Sánchez has worked for Sky Chefs for six years packaging meals for American Airlines flights, and she welcomed the requirement that employers pay at least \$13.23 per hour with health insurance or \$16.40 without.

But her hopefulness quickly faded when she realized she was one of thousands of workers whose employers were exempted. Airlines and their subsidiaries and shops and restaurants with preexisting leases at the airport aren't required to pay the living wage.

"I was so frustrated because I don't know why we can't earn a living wage when you think about how much American Airlines makes," Sánchez said. "I don't know why they can't raise the wages a little bit so we can live a little bit better."

Sánchez started out at Sky Chefs making \$8 an hour in 2012; now she makes \$11.10, not enough to cover the cost of the company's insurance plan, she said. Working eight hours a day five days a week, she doesn't make enough to care for herself and her six-year-old grandson.

"I don't make enough for my rent, for food," she said. "I always have to be thinking about how I can work more to be able to care for my boy."

On Wednesday Sánchez and dozens of other American Airlines workers gathered at MIA's Terminal D to call attention to the fact that they've been left behind. Congresswoman-elect Donna Shalala, a Democrat, joined them.

"We ought to treat employees decently, particularly when a company is making money," said Shalala. "They made billions last year, and they got a big tax cut from the president and that ought to be passed down to workers."

American Airlines reported \$1.9 billion in profit in 2017. CEO Doug Parker made \$12.2 million.

First passed in 1999, the living wage applied to companies working directly for Miami-Dade, including airline subcontractors like Eulen America, which provided wheelchair transportation for airline passengers. American Airlines used to pay Eulen for wheelchair service, but recently moved hundreds of attendants to its own subsidiary, Envoy, which is exempt from the living-wage law. One of those workers, who spoke to the Miami Herald anonymously for fear of retribution, said she went from making \$16.15 per hour to making \$9.50 per hour when the switch happened in November.

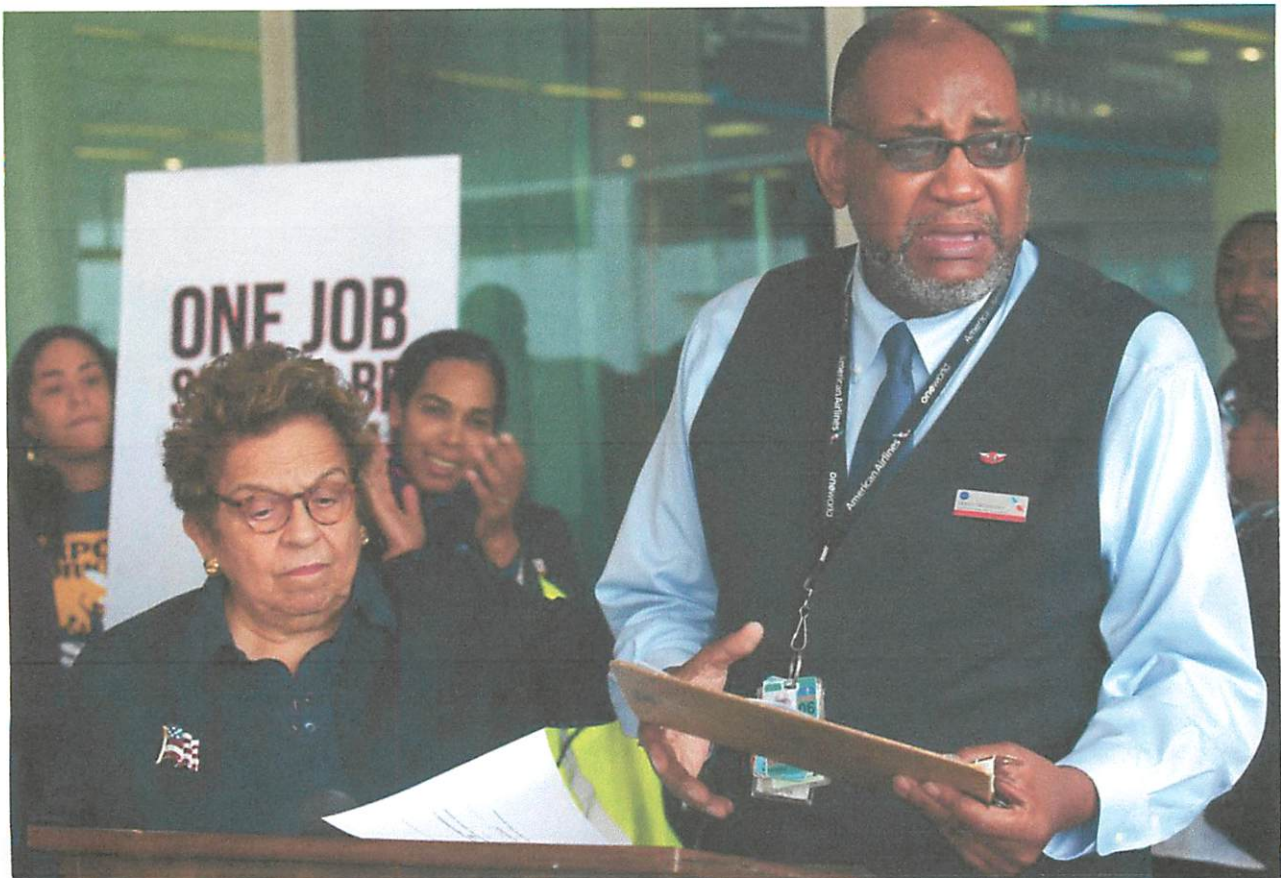
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“It’s so hard,” she said. “I’m working double the time for the same salary. And it’s walking for eight hours, with a lot of responsibility.”

Envoy employees start at just \$9.48 an hour, and more than half make less than \$11 an hour, according to the Communications Workers of America. A recent nationwide survey of 900 Envoy agents showed that 27% rely on public assistance. Others said they have to sell blood plasma, buy out-of-date food and borrow against retirement accounts to get by.



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Congresswoman-elect Donna Shalala listens as James McKnight addresses employees about the death of an employee at work and the need for fair wages.

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Envoy declined to comment on its wages, citing ongoing contract negotiations.

Concessions and retail workers aren't doing any better.

Destiny Taylor, 23, has been a concessions worker for Master ConcessionAir for two years. She started out making \$8.05 an hour, and now she makes \$9.10. She is not eligible for a living wage until Master ConcessionAir's current lease at the airport runs out in 2022.

"We work hard and I think we deserve the living wage like the rest of the workers," Taylor said.

Without the living-wage rule, airport workers would be subject to Florida's minimum wage, currently set at \$8.25 an hour. The county commission originally passed a broader living-wage rule that applied to all tenants at county-owned offices, shops and restaurants, including PortMiami, Metrorail stations, and parks. Mayor Carlos Gimenez vetoed that rule in May, saying it puts the county at a competitive disadvantage.

Commissioner Rebeca Sosa, chairwoman of the Economic Development and Tourism Committee, whose district includes the airport, declined to comment.

Shalala, who will take office in January, wants to see the county commission reverse the exemptions.

"The county put it in place. It's up to the county commissioners to change it."

 COMMENTS 