



# Housing Works Employees Walk Off the Job in an Effort to Unionize

The New York City nonprofit fights homelessness and HIV.

November 4, 2019 By [Trent Straube](#)

Housing Works employees have taken a page from the ACT UP playbook. More than 100 staff members walked out of work last week and protested for the right to unionize. What's more, [Patch reports](#), workers claim CEO Charles King has actively resisted their efforts.



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Marie wants fair pay for navigators, better health insurance and manageable caseloads. If we work together, we can improve our workplace and #FixHousingWorks.

A post shared by [housing works union](#) (@housingworksunion) on Oct 31, 2019 at 1:20pm PDT

Based in New York City, Housing Works addresses the dual epidemics of homelessness and HIV. Also known for its thrift shops and bookstores, the nonprofit sprang out of AIDS activist group ACT UP in 1990. According to [HousingWorks.org](https://www.housingworks.org), the organization has served over 30,000 clients, providing housing, health care services, legal aid, job training, advocacy and more.

At the protest in Brooklyn, workers decried years of overwork and insufficient pay—they cited 16-hour days at \$16 per hour—saying the work environment and high turnover do not align with the nonprofit’s goals.



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This what democracy looks like! @housingworksunion @housingworks #fixhousingworks! #1U #union  
#strike

A post shared by [Chelsea Connor](#) (@chelseaconnor) on Oct 29, 2019 at 7:59am PDT

“I try to connect and build relationships with each of my clients,” Housing Works care manager Rebecca Mitnik told Patch. “But carrying a high caseload makes it difficult for me to provide the quality of care they deserve. It’s a mental health issue, a work-life balance issue, and it cannot be fixed with self-care.”

King, who helped found Housing Works, told The New York Times that the organization “already pays much higher than the average salary for community-based organizations in New York City, and we already have much lower caseloads. So the likelihood that it’s going to dramatically change, that is just not real in a Medicaid-funded program.”



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David, like a lot of workers, is concerned about understaffing. Let's unionize, sit down at the table with management and #FixHousingWorks.

A post shared by [housing works union](#) (@housingworksunion) on Nov 3, 2019 at 8:22am PST

Housing Works employees began their organizing efforts with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, known as Local 338 RWDSU/UFCW, nearly a year ago.

Those involved in the unionizing efforts launched [HousingWorksUnion.org](#), which explains why they want a union: "Having a union at Housing Works would give us the right to collectively bargain over our working conditions in a structured, transparent way over items such as pay, benefits, training, safety standards, staffing requirements, and other important issues that would make our day to day lives and those of our clients better. We love Housing Works and its mission, but if we can take more ownership over our working conditions, Housing Works can be a job that we can commit to long term."

In related news, to read the history of how the AIDS activists of ACT UP became the real estate developers of Housing Works, visit "[Making HIV History and Housing \[SLIDESHOW\]](#)."