



Sweeping in Change:

South Florida Janitors Unite for Responsibility in the Commercial Real Estate Industry



November 2019

Sweeping in Change



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About the Authors



SEIU Local 32BJ is the largest property service union in the country. Local 32BJ represents over 75,000 janitors up and down the Eastern Seaboard, including janitors in South Florida.



The UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge (CNK) conducts basic and applied research on the socioeconomic formation and internal dynamics

of neighborhoods, and how these collective spatial units are positioned and embedded within regions. CNK also focuses on understanding the causes, patterns and consequences of socioeconomic inequality, with the goal of identifying effective interventions.

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Sweeping in Change



Introduction

Few regions offer a more attractive destination for businesses to call home than South Florida. Beyond its glorified beaches and warm weather, millions of people from across the world have moved to South Florida and built communities that represent the best of America's values: democracy, diversity, and hard work. As more employers relocate to South Florida, it is no surprise that South Florida commercial real estate continues to grow in value. From Pembroke Pines to Little Havana, billions of dollars are trading hands each year over South Florida's premier commercial buildings. Yet one group has yet to receive their fair share of these profits: the janitors who keep South Florida's buildings clean and safe.

Janitors play a crucial role in the South Florida economy, while being some of the most exploited workers in the real estate industry. Poverty wages, lack of benefits, sexual harassment, wage theft, and workplace threats and intimidation are endemic in the janitorial industry. Often considered an "unseen workforce", thousands of janitors' make their way to South Florida's most valuable office buildings

at night, keeping work areas sanitary for tenants and maintaining property values for investors. For their hard work, Miami's office janitors receive a median wage of \$8.50. Without meaningful change in Miami's janitorial industry, regional inequality will surely grow as developers build more luxury commercial buildings.

However, workers in Miami are now speaking up and taking action. If South Florida is serious about creating a forward-thinking economy, then it is time for the region to deliver justice for its janitors.

About this Report

This report situates the experiences of office janitors within South Florida's real estate market, primarily Miami. The report analyses statistics published by sources such as the Bureau of Labor Studies, the U.S. Census, and various real estate industry reports, as well as SEIU 32BJ's own survey data of South Florida's commercial office market.



Executive Summary

★ **While Miami's real estate market prosters, janitors are left behind.** The industries that play a role in buying and selling, building, and renting Miami's real estate have seen their earnings grow, while janitors have not. In the past two decades, real wages in Miami's janitorial industry have grown by a meager 1.6%. During that same time, real wages for lessors of real estate, portfolio management (including real estate asset management), and commercial building construction have gone up by 29%, 28%, and 16% respectively.

★ **This inequality is particularly stark for sub-contracted office janitors.** An estimated 89% of large office buildings outsource their cleaning jobs to contractors. The median wage for these janitors is an estimated \$8.50, placing them in the bottom 10% for subcontracted janitorial earnings in Florida. 57% live below or near the federal poverty level, 69% are rent burdened with a full 31% spending half their income on rent, 49% are uninsured, and 33% must rely on government assistance programs like SNAP to make ends meet. Meanwhile, Miami has become the 12th most valuable office real estate market in the U.S.

★ **Without intervention, Miami will continue to be one of the worst metro areas in the country for janitors to live.** Miami ranks last among major U.S. metropolitan areas for janitorial wages, when taking into account the cost of living. Raising standards for office janitors is both an urgent need and economically feasible. Janitors' wages currently comprise only an estimated 1.4 cents on the rental dollar, or 1.4% of Miami's average office rental income. Raising wages to \$15 an hour, with employer paid health insurance, and one week paid vacation would be pennies on the dollar.

★ **It is time to support South Florida's Justice for Janitors Campaign.** Janitors in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh—all of which have lower office rental rates and a lower cost of living than Miami—have experienced the benefits of an industry-wide union contract for decades. These benefits includes higher wages, employer-paid healthcare, and paid sick days. Miami residents should support organizing efforts among office janitors, as they also deserve a living wage, healthcare, and dignity and respect on the job.

1. State of the industry

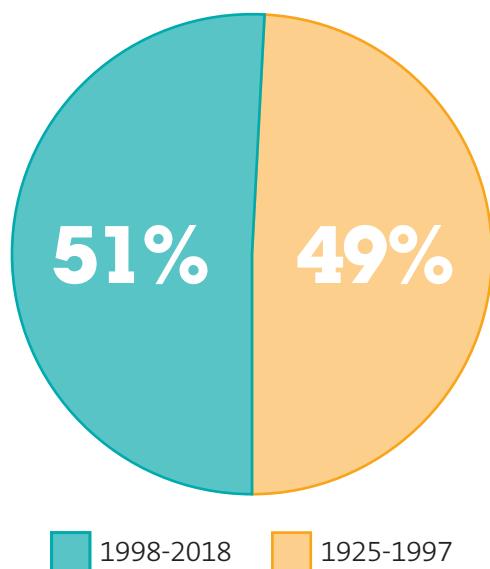
A Growing Region

There are an estimated 40,200 janitors in the greater Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach Metro area, the 9th most in the country.¹ Janitors play a vital role in protecting the short-term and long-term value of South Florida's office complexes, apartments, condominiums, shopping centers, and other valuable buildings. Research has found that concern about building upkeep significantly affects rental rates, tenant satisfaction, and tenant longevity, placing janitors on the front lines for protecting value in the real estate market.²

The role of janitors is even more important in a place like Miami, where the commercial real estate market is growing considerably in size and value. According to property appraiser data, 51% of Miami-Dade's major office, residential, and retail buildings were constructed in the last twenty years.³

Figure 1

Percentage of square feet constructed between time-periods in Miami-Dade. Includes office, retail, and residential buildings above 100,000 square feet.



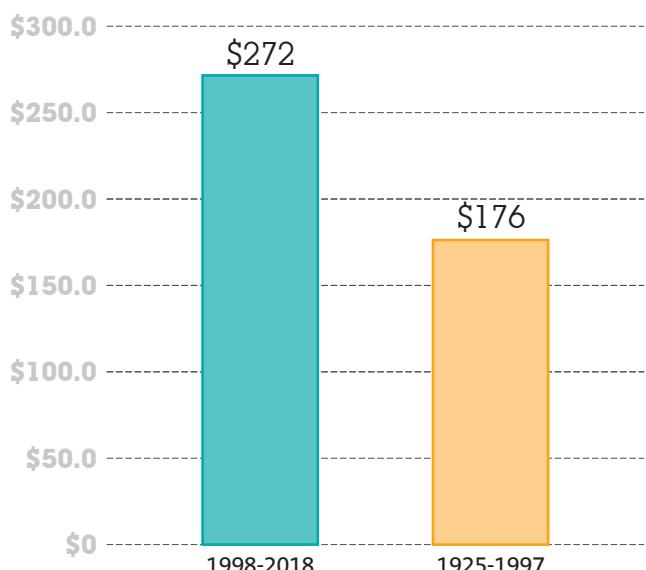
Authors calculations based on Miami-Dade County Appraiser data.



More so, 62% of the total market value for large office, residential, and retail buildings derive from buildings constructed in the past twenty years. Large buildings constructed after 1998 are almost \$100 more valuable per square foot than large buildings constructed before 1998. These figures will likely increase, as office building development in the Miami area has now reached its highest level since 2009.⁴

Figure 2

Per square foot value of buildings constructed between time-periods in Miami-Dade. Includes office, retail, and residential buildings above 100,000 square feet.

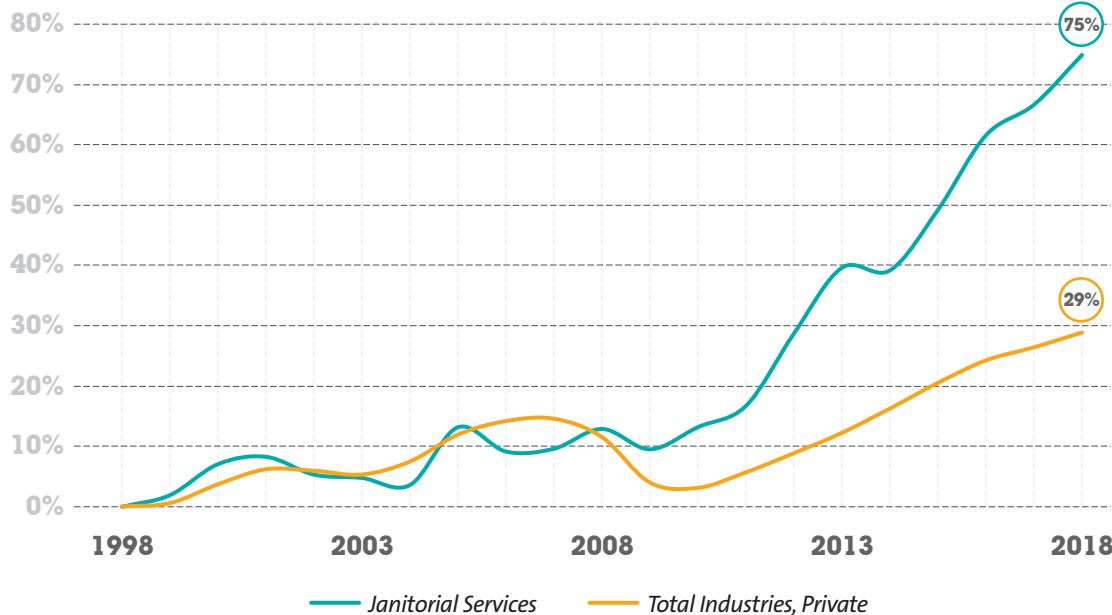


Authors calculations based on Miami-Dade County Appraiser data.

Increases in building square footage and market value correlate with an increase in the number of janitors employed in the Miami metro area. Since 1998, employment in Miami's janitorial industry has grown by 75%, almost three times the rate of employment growth for the greater Miami area.⁵

Figure 3

Employment growth in private sector industries in the Miami metropolitan area, indexed to 1998.



Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Bureau of Labor Studies.

While growth in occupations such as software development have garnered attention in South Florida, the occupations gaining the most new jobs are primarily in the low-wage service sector. This includes janitors, which are ranked third in 2018-2026 projections for occupations forecasted for most jobs in Miami-Dade, and fifth in Broward County.⁶

An Excluded Workforce

Despite the important role that janitors play in maintaining safety and cleanliness inside buildings, janitors have received little benefits from Miami's growing real estate market. In the past twenty years, lessors of real estate, portfolio management, and commercial building construction—industries associated with commercial real estate—have all experienced significant real wage growth, well outpacing Miami's economy. On the other hand, wages in the janitorial industry have increased by a mere 1.6%.⁷



My name is Maria,

In 2006, I worked as a cleaner at the University of Miami. I used to earn \$5.40 an hour, but after a lot of fighting, we won the union and obtained better wages, along with benefits for the first time. We won a salary of \$9.98 an hour, which gave me stability and tranquility for my two kids. Now 17 years later, I'm working as a cleaner for SFM, in a wealthy office building where I earn less than what we earned 17 years ago at the University of Miami.

Figure 4

Real wage growth in private sector industries in the Miami metropolitan area, indexed to 1998.

1998-2018 Real Wage Growth

Industry (private)	Percent Growth	Annual Earnings Increase
Lessors of Real Estate	28.9%	\$11,347
Portfolio Management	28.1%	\$40,558
Commercial Building Construction	15.8%	\$10,686
Total Private Industry	7.6%	\$3,763
Janitorial Services	1.6%	\$319

Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Bureau of Labor Studies.

Of these four industries, janitors were the only group to experience their real wages dip below 1998 levels for multiple years after the recession. And while the per square foot value of Miami's real estate market has now reached pre-recession annual figures, janitors saw a meager \$35 increase in annual real wages between 2017-2018, or 2 cents per hour for full-time workers.





2. Comparing Wages in Miami to other Markets:

Miami's Bottom Rank

Across South Florida, workers are grappling with the difficulties of a rising cost of living. Among major metro areas, Miami has experienced the largest increase in housing costs relative to median income since 1990. Miami is now considered the most unaffordable major metro area in the country for housing.⁸ Miami is also the second least affordable major metro area for public transportation, making it difficult for low-wage workers to travel to and from work.⁹

Using wage and price data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, wages for janitors can be compared across metropolitan areas while taking into account the cost of living.¹⁰ While wages for many Miami workers lag behind other metro areas, low-wage service industries are particularly struggling. **In combination with low wage growth, the rising cost of living has made South Florida one of the worst compensated places for a janitor in the United States.** Adjusted for cost of living, Miami ranks last in the country for janitorial wages among major metropolitan areas.¹¹



My name is Miriam,

I work as a cleaner with a salary of \$8.50 per hour. I have another job because it's barely enough to pay my rent, I also can't help my family in Nicaragua. I have a daughter who lives there, she's 14 years old and tells me that she has two more years before going to college. My daughter dreams of being a doctor, do you think that with this salary I can pay for her studies, when that is the most expensive career in Nicaragua and the world? That is why I demand a fair salary, so that my daughter can accomplish her dream and become a professional.

Figure 5

Major metro areas by adjusted median janitorial wage. Wage data from Occupational Employment Statistics.

Major Metro Areas by Median Janitorial Wage (2018)

Rank	Metro Area	Wage Adjusted for Cost of Living	Population
53	Miami - Fort Lauderdale - West Palm Beach, FL	\$10.05	6.158.824
52	Houston - The Woodlands - Sugar Land, TX	\$10.52	6.892.427
51	Salt Lake City, UT	\$10.72	1.203.105
50	Virginia Beach - Norfolk - Newport News, VA-NC	\$10.81	1.724.388
49	New Orleans - Metairie, LA	\$10.83	1.275.762
48	Orlando - Kissimmee - Sanford, FL	\$10.99	2.509.831
47	Richmond, VA	\$11.17	1.301.540
46	Raleigh, NC	\$11.20	1.335.079
45	Washington - Arlington - Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	\$11.40	6.216.710
44	Dallas - Fort Worth - Arlington, TX	\$11.61	7.400.479

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Wages adjusted by regional price parity.

The Miami metro area is ranked last in the State of Florida as well. From Ocala to Pensacola, Miami janitors earn a lower wage when considering the costs of housing, food, and other goods and services. Even when ignoring these differences in cost of living, wages for janitors in Miami are lower than in Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Gainesville, and Tampa.

How Similar Cities Fare

When comparing Miami to large metro areas with a similar cost of living, such as Chicago, Baltimore, and Seattle, janitors in Miami receive an average wage of \$3.56 less per hour.¹² While these metro areas have taken steps to raise standards for building service workers—such as achieving industry contracts in the commercial office sector, or raising the minimum wage to \$15 dollars—the Miami market has comparatively lower standards.



Figure 6

Comparison between Miami and major metro areas with the closest cost of living.

Major Metro Areas with Similar Cost of Living as Miami, by Median Janitorial Wage (2018)

Regional Price Parity	Metro Area	Wage Adjusted for Cost of Living	Industry Contract for Commercial Cleaners	Current Minimum Wage
108.4	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	\$10.05	No	\$8.46
107.2	Baltimore-Columbia-Towson, MD	\$11.73	Yes	\$10.10
106.3	Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	\$11.92	Yes	\$11.10
105.4	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	\$13.24	Yes	\$7.25
103.4	Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	\$13.25	Yes	\$13.00
107.2	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	\$13.64	No	\$12.00
102.2	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	\$14.17	Yes	\$12.25
102	Sacramento--Roseville--Arden-Arcade, CA	\$14.32	Yes	\$12.00
111.8	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	\$14.39	Yes	\$16.00
111.8	Boston-Cambridge-Nashua, MA-NH	\$14.59	Yes	\$12.00
101.8	Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT	\$15.18	Yes	\$11.00

Wage data from Occupational Employment Statistics. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Regional price parities from Real Personal Income for States and Metropolitan Areas. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.



My name is Elsa,

and I've worked in a Brickell office building for 7 months. My salary is \$9.00 per hour. I am diabetic and I do not make enough to even cover my medical costs. For example, my insulin costs \$25 per tube a week, and I am supposed to buy two tubes. Because I can only afford one, I have to ration my medicine. After I pay my bills I'm only left with \$100 for the rest of the month. If I buy four tubes of insulin, that would be all of my money. I am forced to make the little I can afford last me as long as possible.



3. Outsourcing Janitorial Jobs In South Florida

A Race to the Bottom

As shown in figure 4, the industries that often buy and sell, build, and rent out Miami's commercial real estate have seen their earnings significantly grow in the last two decades, while the janitorial industry has not. **A significant change in how companies provide janitorial services—and a reason why Miami's janitorial wages are so low—is the implementation of subcontracting.** Subcontracting is when an employer contracts with another company to provide services, rather than directly employ workers for that service. It is estimated that janitorial subcontracting increased from 16 to 22 percent in the 1980s and 1990s.¹³ In South Florida, subcontracted janitors account for an estimated 30% of all janitors.¹⁴

In an industry like janitorial services, contractors face low barriers to market entry, a high percentage of labor costs relative to overall expenses, and are limited in their ability to differentiate by service.¹⁵ These dynamics encourage

contractors to get ahead by reducing labor costs as much as possible, including converting full-time employees to part-time, reducing costs associated with job training and safety, and even committing wage theft.¹⁶ Without intervention, many contractors in South Florida will continue to resist responsible contracting standards for janitors.

Using 2013-2017 data from the American Community Survey (ACS), wage, benefit, and demographic data for both non-subcontracted and subcontracted janitors can be compared.¹⁷

Figure 7

Economic comparison between subcontracted and non-subcontracted janitors in the Miami metro area.

Comparison between Subcontracted and Non-Subcontracted Janitors in Miami Metro Area (2013-2017)

Category	Sub-contracted Janitors	Non-Sub-contracted Janitors
Median Annual Earnings	\$16.468	\$20.799
In Households with Public Assistance Income or SNAP	33%	26%
Rent Burdened	69%	58%
Receives Employer-based Health Insurance	25%	50%
Uninsured	49%	26%
Income Below or Near Federal Poverty Line	57%	45%

ACS 2013-2017 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Excludes self-employed janitors.

Subcontracted janitors in the Miami metro area make \$4,331 less in annual earnings than non-subcontracted janitors. 57% of subcontracted janitors live below or near the federal poverty line, compared to 45% of non-subcontracted janitors. 49% of subcontracted janitors are uninsured, compared to 26% of non-subcontracted janitors and 18% of the total Miami metro area population. In addition, subcontracted janitors are more likely to live in households where a family member receives public assistance or SNAP in order to make ends meet. While both groups feature a high percentage of rent-burdened workers, 69% of subcontracted janitors spend between one third to one half of their wages on rent, compared to 58% of non-subcontracted janitors.

Who are South Florida's Janitors?

Like many low-wage service occupations, subcontracted janitors are disproportionately comprised of people of color. South Florida is no exception, as only 10% of janitors are White Non-Hispanic, compared to 31% of the metropolitan area.

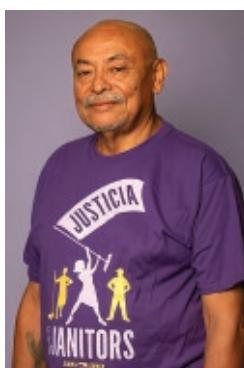
Figure 8

Demographic comparison between subcontracted and non-subcontracted janitors in the Miami metro area.

Comparison between Subcontracted and Non-Subcontracted Janitors in Miami Metro Area (2013-2017)

Group	Category	Sub-contracted Janitors	Non-Sub-contracted Janitors
Race/Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic White	10%	12%
	Black	15%	29%
	Hispanic	73%	57%
	Other	1%	2%
Nativity	Native-born	21%	31%
	Foreign-born	79%	69%
Language Proficiency	Limited English Proficient (LEP)	67%	51%
	Non-LEP	33%	49%
Gender	Male	52%	69%
	Female	48%	31%
Age	Median Age	46	50

ACS 2013-2017 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Excludes self-employed janitors.



My name is Julio,

I work for the company CRS as a janitor. I work in the Brickell neighborhood in Miami. Brickell is a very prestigious commercial area, where banks and other financial institutions handle millions of dollars. The building I clean is also very prestigious. Many consulting firms

operate throughout its 26 floors. The luxury I see makes me think about the contradiction between this building and the salaries we receive, which are salaries of poverty and misery. Especially as expensive as Miami is. My employer pays me \$8.55 per hour, four hours a day.

Compared to non-subcontracted janitors, subcontracted janitors feature a higher percentage of women and immigrants. The relatively high percentage of women among subcontracted janitors is important to note, as previous research has demonstrated that janitors are at higher risk of workplace sexual harassment and assault due to isolated work environments.¹⁸ In addition, immigration status and English-language proficiency can serve as a barrier to remedying workplace harassment and assault in low-wage industries, particularly if workers are undocumented.¹⁹



4. Inequality in Commercial Office Real Estate

Low Wages in Miami's Most Valuable Offices

Commercial office buildings make up a significant portion of cleaning contractors' clients. Commercial cleaning represents an estimated 69% of the market for cleaning contractors, compared to residencies (11%), educational facilities (10%), and government and NGOs (10%).²⁰ Unfortunately, low contracting standards are prevalent amongst South Florida's largest commercial office buildings.

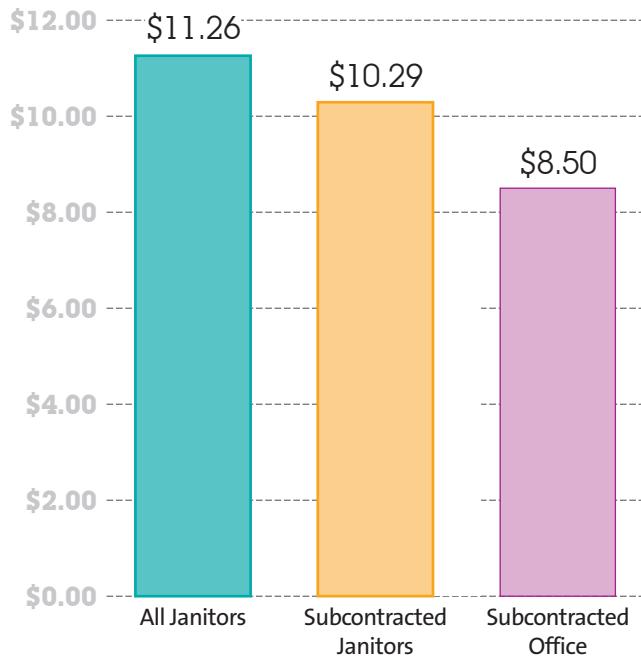
Based on survey data collected by SEIU 32BJ, an estimated 89.6% of Miami-Dade and Broward County's large office buildings outsource their cleaning jobs to contractors.²¹ While the median hourly wage for subcontracted janitors in the Miami metro area is \$10.29, the median wage for subcontracted office janitors is an estimated \$8.50.²² This fig-

ure places South Florida's office janitors in the bottom 10% for subcontracted janitorial wages in the state of Florida.²³

Low standards in the commercial office market are not limited to wages and benefits. Through interviews with workers, office cleaners have spoken out about issues such as favoritism from management, working through illness and injuries, understaffing, paying for uniforms, no training for handling hazardous chemicals, and inappropriate touching from supervisors. These issues speak to a lack of respect that some janitors have identified. As Manuel, a janitor in Coral Gables states: "I would like to work for a responsible company that appreciates and values the work that my coworkers and I do, that understands that we are human beings and not machines, that provides a salary that really compensates all the effort and dedication that we put into doing our job."

Figure 9

Median Wages for janitors in Miami.



Estimates for janitors and subcontracted janitors derive from ACS 2013- 2017 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Estimates exclude workers who identify as self-employed. Estimates for subcontracted office janitors based on SEIU 32BJ survey.

Low wages and benefits for janitors in commercial office buildings contrast with Miami's wealthy commercial office market, which is currently outpacing national earnings. In 2018, the average price per square foot of office space sold in Miami was \$304 dollars, surpassing pre-recession figures and making Miami the 12th most valuable office market in the United States.²⁴ Miami is currently constructing 1.9 million square feet in office space, the most since 2009.²⁵ Office rental rates continue to increase, with Miami ranked 11th in the country among major markets for office rents.²⁶ While less valuable, Broward County's commercial office market has experienced annual increases in rental rates for the past five years, while vacancy rates have declined from over 15% to 9% since 2014.²⁷

"South Florida is relatively large and fast growing. We want to follow and chase that growth, which is why we continue to open locations here."

Lawrence Gelehrstedt
VP of Real Estate Management for the Southeast, WeWork.²⁸

These favorable market conditions have increasingly attracted major investors to South Florida. In 2018, 67% of office buildings purchased in Miami and 48% of purchases in Broward County were from institutional investors or real estate investment trusts (REITs).³⁰ These investors typically manage billions of dollars of assets, often investing on behalf of institutions like pension funds, insurance companies, or endowments.

While office cleaners in Miami are struggling to make ends meet, the buildings they clean are helping to grow the wealth of some of the financial industry's largest corporations. Reviewing property deeds of office buildings above 100,000 square feet, the real estate investment arms of TIAA and Deutsche Bank are the two largest entities affiliated with commercial office square feet across Broward and Miami Dade County.³¹ Together, the market value of their South Florida office assets total \$1.62 billion. Across the world, TIAA and Deutsche Bank together manage over \$1.6 trillion in assets. The third largest is Ponte Gadea, a private investment firm that is controlled by Amancio Ortega, owner of the Zara clothing line and the sixth richest man in the world, whose estimated net worth is \$70.5 billion.³² Despite these entities' lucrative wealth, janitors at some of their Miami office buildings make as little as \$8.46-\$9.00 per hour.

"Miami has evolved into a worldwide epicenter for development and investment with countless international players operating within our market."

Charles Penan
Vice President, Aztec Group²⁹

Calculating the Cost to Raise Commercial Wages

Based on employment and wage estimates for office buildings in Miami, it is possible to estimate the cost associated with raising building standards in Miami's commercial office market.³³ Figure 10 illustrates just how large of a gap exists between cleaning costs and rental income. **Janitors' wages currently comprise an estimated 1.4 cents on the rental dollar, or 1.4% of Miami's average office rental income.** Assuming that the increase in cleaning costs is entirely passed on to tenants, rents would increase by less than 2% if janitors received a wage increase to \$15.00 an hour, employer-paid health insurance, and one week of paid vacation per year.

Figure 10

Minimum Wage vs. Union Cleaning Costs in Miami.

Annual Cleaning Cost Per 100,000 Square Feet, Minimum Wage, No Benefits	\$52.790
Annual Cleaning Cost Per 100,000 Square Feet, \$15.00 per Hour, Employer-Paid Healthcare, 1 Week Paid Vacation	\$116.640
Projected Annual Cleaning Cost Increase Per 100,000 Square Feet	\$63.850
Average Annual Office Rental Income per 100,000 Square Feet, Miami Commercial Office Market	\$3.911.000
Rental Income Percentage Increase	1.6%

Average asking office lease rates based on CBRE Q3 2019 Miami Office Report. Costing estimate assumes three full-time janitors per 100,000 square feet.



These projected costs are similar across South Florida submarkets. In Brickell, Miami's most expensive office market, total union wage cleaning costs would represent 2 cents on the rental dollar. In Broward County, union wage cleaning costs would represent just over 5 cents on the rental dollar, while cleaning costs in the Miami area as a whole would make up less than 3 cents on the rental dollar.

Figure 11

Cleaning costs on the rental dollar for selected South Florida markets.

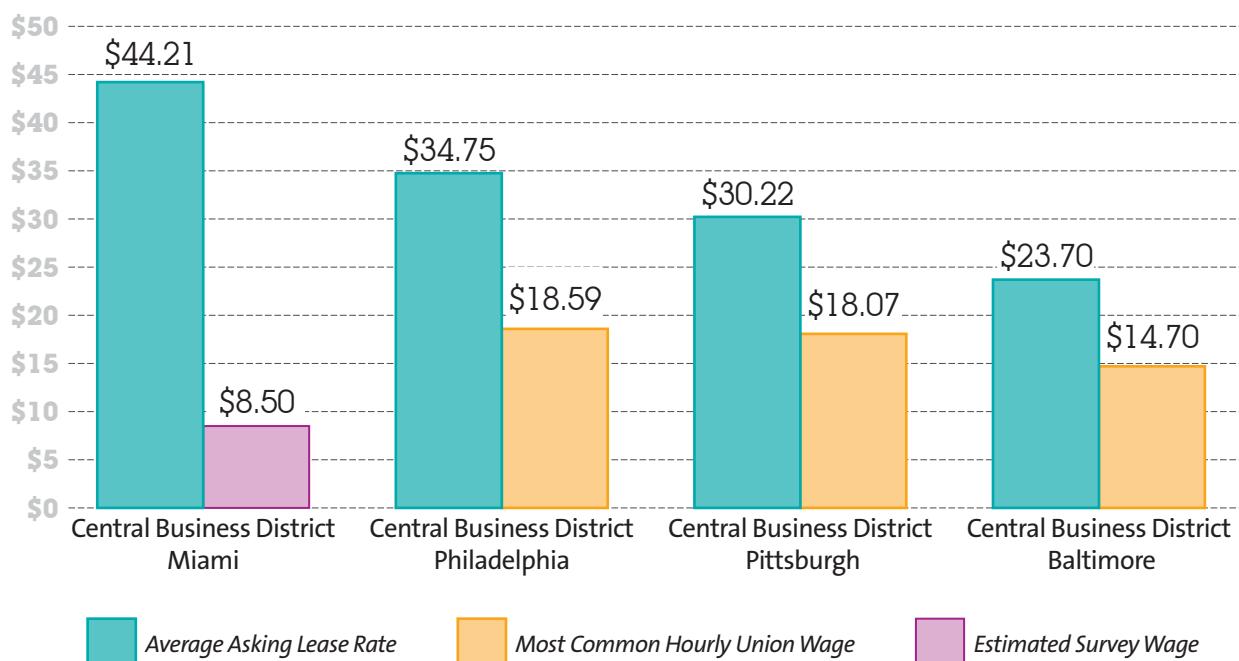
Market	Per Square Office Rental Rate	Union Wage Cleaning costs as percentage of Rental Dollar	Union Wage Cleaning Costs on Rental Dollar
Miami Total	\$39.11	2.98%	\$0.03
Broward Total	\$22.03	5.29%	\$0.05
Miami Downtown	\$41.63	2.80%	\$0.03
Downtown Fort Lauderdale	\$31.81	3.67%	\$0.04
Miami Suburban	\$35.64	3.27%	\$0.03
Airport/Doral	\$32.16	3.63%	\$0.04
Aventura	\$46.45	2.51%	\$0.03
Coral Gables	\$40.75	2.86%	\$0.03
Brickell	\$48.66	2.40%	\$0.02
Miami Beach	\$47.07	2.48%	\$0.02
South Dade	\$27.20	4.29%	\$0.04

Average asking lease rates based on CBRE Q3 2019 Miami and Broward County Office Reports. Costing estimate assumes three full-time janitors per 100,000 square feet.

If South Florida were to raise building standards, the area would join the ranks of major commercial office markets across the United States—including New York City, Boston, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles—that have made progress in establishing responsible contracting standards. In these cities, labor unions have achieved significant density among downtown and suburban office markets, resulting in living wages and meaningful benefits for hundreds of thousands of workers. Despite increases in labor costs, the office markets in these areas remain profitable. Many of these areas actually have lower average rents and a lower cost of living than in Miami.

Figure 12

Average asking lease rents compared to office janitor wages in central business district office markets. Most common hourly union wage estimates from collective bargaining agreements.



Average asking lease rates from CBRE Q3 2019 market research.



My name is Manuel,

I've been working at CBM Company for 2 years. I have another job during the day because the salary I make at both jobs, is barely enough for me to survive. My knees are worn out because I'm standing all day and night. On weekends I clean houses because my salary is not enough. I don't have sick days or any other benefits. Two months ago, my knees swelled up, which makes it difficult for me to walk. The doctor said I should rest in order to relieve the inflammation, but I don't have the option of taking a few days off. If I don't come to work, I don't get paid, and if I miss a few days, I run the risk of losing my job. I would like to work for a responsible company that appreciated and valued the work that we do, that understood that we're human beings and not machines. That we had a salary that reflected all the effort and dedication that we put into our job, and that we could enjoy benefits like paid vacation, sick days, and paid holidays, so that we could rest our bodies, without worrying that we won't have enough money.



5. Conclusion: South Florida Janitors Need Justice

Raising Standards Benefits the Entire Community

As Miami's commercial real estate market grows, janitors—particularly office janitors—are being left behind. However, this will not last for long. Janitors across South Florida are now coming together to raise their voices and demand respect, dignity, and a fair wage for their work. Not only will raising industry standards benefit janitors and their families, it will also bring positive economic growth

to the region. Research has demonstrated that increases in hourly wages for low-wage workers stimulates spending and has a positive multiplier effect for regional economic growth.³⁴

The commercial cleaning industry is profitable and growing, as are the building owners that rely on janitors to clean and safeguard their South Florida assets. Raising standards through unionization and other forms of collective action in the commercial office industry is an investment in the communities and families of South Florida.

It is also a reflection of South Florida's commitment to diversity, democracy, and hard work. Unionization in low-wage industries helps narrow the racial wealth gap and the gender pay gap. Unionized women earn 9% higher wages; unionized Hispanic workers earn 23% more; and unionized Black workers earn 17% more than their non-union counterparts do.³⁵ Unionization in low-wage industries also provides workers with a voice in their workplace, and is associated with increases in voter engagement. Voting rates are 5 percentage points higher among union members than nonmembers.³⁶

Justice for Janitors: Janitors Demand a Seat at the Table

Almost 30 years ago, a group of underpaid janitors—predominantly immigrant women and men—went on strike in Los Angeles, launching the Justice for Janitors movement. Since then, more than 160,000 janitors have won a union, wage increases, and benefits. When adding pay raises union janitors have won, over 1 billion dollars have flowed back into the families and neighborhoods where these cleaners reside.³⁷

In South Florida, janitors at the University of Miami led one of the most important organizing campaigns in the South, when they held a successful seventeen day hunger strike more than a decade ago. In the end, the janitors won union representation, labor protections, significant wage increases, 100% employer paid health insurance, paid days off, and other benefits.

These successful organizing campaigns created a blueprint in South Florida and across the country, inspiring other low wage workers—including security officers, fast food and airport workers—to join together and improve their working conditions.

Today, office janitors carry on that struggle. A workforce of office janitors that earn a fair wage and are treated with dignity is in everyone's interest, and will build a brighter future for South Florida.

End Notes

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- 11** Regional price parity data is matched with median janitorial wage data for metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), except for the New England region. For New England, the Bureau of Labor Statistics uses New England city & town areas (NECTAs) instead of MSAs. NECTAs that share a similar geographic boundary to an MSA were included in the dataset. NECTAs that do not have a corresponding metro area are excluded from the dataset. MSAs in Puerto Rico are also excluded from the dataset. MSA definitions are based on OMB Bulletin No. 150-01. Population for MSAs and NECTAs are sourced from 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, U.S. Census. Major metro areas are defined as metro areas with a population greater than 1,000,000.
- 12** Major Metro areas with a similar cost of living are selected by taking the ten metro areas with the closest absolute value to Miami's regional price parity.
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- 17** ACS calculations in this section are produced by Chhandara Pech and Silvia R. González at the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge. The data source for this section is the ACS 2013-2017 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Janitors are defined as those with occupation census code ‘4220’ (“Janitors and Building Cleaners”). Subcontracted janitors are defined as those with occupation census code ‘4220’ and industry census code ‘7690’ (“Services to Buildings and Dwellings (Except Cleaning during Construction and Immediately after Construction)”). Sample is restricted to janitors who reported employment within the last year.
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- 21** Cleaning contractor estimates for Miami-Dade and Broward County office buildings based on an SEIU 32BJ survey of office buildings above 100,000 square feet, conducted in 11/2018.
- 22** Wage estimates for Miami-Dade and Broward County office janitors based on an SEIU 32BJ survey of 72 commercial office buildings above 100,000 square feet, conducted in November 2018. Wage estimates for subcontracted janitors from ACS 2013-2017 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).
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37 Dollar figure estimate based on the total sum of wage increases received by janitors covered by an SEIU collective bargaining agreement.



Sweeping in Change

The background of the image features a complex, abstract pattern of overlapping teal-colored polygons. The polygons vary in size and orientation, creating a sense of depth and movement. The color palette is a gradient of teal shades, from dark blue-teal to light mint green, with some darker shadows and highlights that emphasize the three-dimensional nature of the design.

Sweeping in Change