

Testimony of Meghan Peterson, DC37 Local 3005 President

September 2, 2026

My name is Meghan Peterson and I am the President of DC 37 Local 3005. We represent scientists, including “water ecologists,” at the Health Department. I am testifying about labor issues that are impacting recruitment and retention of inspectors which are long-standing, and pre-date the present administration.

- The city could not recruit a full headcount of water ecologists because the salaries are too low to live on in New York City. As of July 15, the city was advertising level 1 positions for a starting salary of 52,000 per year. These staff are told they should serve New York when they cannot afford housing costs in this city
 - While the union was recently awarded equity funds to modestly increase the salary, water ecologists have expressed to me that they are worried that new hires will leave. Staffing problems will persist so long as the salary is not competitive.
- Secondly, OMB delays prevented timely staff recruitment. OMB regularly takes over a year to approve candidates. This was a best case scenario with media attention from last summer’s outbreak in Harlem. Still, the Monday after the outbreak was announced, a group of water ecologists were finally approved for onboarding by OMB.
 - Dragging out hiring is often used by the city as a mechanism to save costs and it must end. For instance, the Fiscal 2027 Executive budget Plan includes savings of \$2.5 million in Fiscal 2026 due to the slower-than-anticipated ramp up of legionella prevention funded in the November 2025 Plan. The agency stated that these savings would not result in any programmatic impact, however, we saw this was not the case. Using drawn out hiring timelines as a budgeting trick is harming our neighbors
 - OMB delays are also a major reason for the privatization of city services, as the agency will hire contracted services to circumvent hiring delays
- Third, water ecologists level 2 and below have been left out of the flexible work pilot that was bargained in 2023 between the city and DC 37. Flexible scheduling and benefits could improve employee retention. If water ecologists adopted compressed schedules, they could increase the number of inspections they complete in a week—from 10 (5x2 inspections/day) to 12 (4x3 inspections/day).
 - However, whenever the local has approached the Office of Labor relations in good faith to discuss working conditions in the position, we have been shut out. The Office of Labor Relations should be actively working with the union, as we represent the people who are closest to the work. We want a relationship of collaborative bargaining, but we need the agency’s Office of Labor Relations to meet us halfway and take a solutions-oriented approach to labor issues
 - Water ecologists complete inspections in the public, in extreme heat, and amid occupational hazards like exposure to environmental hazards. They do not receive any hazard pay

I encourage you to take a holistic approach to the crisis of city salaries not sustaining city rent, OMB hiring delays, and taking a collaborative approach to bargaining to resolve retention issues in the city. We are looking forward to talking more.