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# **Starbucks Partners Defy Union Busting, File for Elections at Two More Stores**

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In spite of an intense union-busting effort by corporate executives, including the president of Starbucks North America, Rossann Williams, partners from two more Buffalo-area Starbucks locations are filing petitions with the National Labor Relations Board to hold official union elections. Starbucks partners from the Walden & Anderson and Transit Commons stores will announce their filing at a press conference Wednesday morning at 10:30am, at the Tri-Main Building, 2495 Main St., Suite 556, Buffalo, NY. The two new NLRB filings come just over a week after three other Buffalo area stores—Camp Road, Cheektowaga, and Elmwood Avenue—filed their own petitions for union elections.

The day after the Starbucks partners announced last week that they had gathered strong majorities at the three locations, Williams flew into Buffalo with her corporate team from Seattle and other areas of the country to launch an anti-union campaign.

Starbucks partners from around the region are reporting an increased and overbearing presence of management on shop floors. This presence includes store visits from Williams herself and other high-level executives.

Last week, Williams, along with the regional manager and partner resource manager, hosted listening sessions with Buffalo-area Starbucks partners. According to Williams, these listening sessions are routine and not a response to the union campaign.

“It’s disrespectful and patronizing,” said Casey Moore, a partner at the Williamsville Place Starbucks. “Rossann called these conversations ‘open, honest, and routine.’ Yet no one has ever heard of top executives coming in for a listening session. It’s clear that Rossann and other management are here because we announced a union organizing campaign.”

Other workers voiced similar frustrations around Williams’ listening sessions. “They evoke neither the ‘third place’ nor the Starbucks experience,” said Katie Cook, a partner at the filing Walden & Anderson store. “These sessions are, at best, a band-aid, and they’re completely one-sided. We want a union so we can be true partners, so that our listening sessions can evolve into honest negotiations.”

“Since the campaign has started, lots of corporate executives have swarmed the Buffalo-area stores, more than I’ve seen in my four years with Starbucks,” said Michael Sanabria, who works at the Transit Commons location that is now filing. “I think they were attempting to find out our frustrations so they can fix them and convince us to give up the union campaign. I don’t count this as listening to our voices in the way a union would make our voices heard.”



Colin Cochran, a barista at Walden & Anderson, spoke about major and sudden changes at his workplace since the organizing campaign went public. This past Sunday, management announced that his store would be closing for several weeks to clean; address a recurring wasp infestation; reorganize; and retrain employees. "We all knew that these problems needed to be addressed," said Cochran. "But all of these changes were top-down, and no partners were consulted. We need a union to guarantee a true partnership with Starbucks where they listen to our concerns all the time, not just when we are unionizing, and come to us about key decisions."

In recent developments, partners at the three stores that filed last week for NLRB elections were notified that they must attend mandatory one-hour meetings with management. "They're shutting the store down early for them, which is... suspicious... they're with upper management and it's honestly worrying me a lot" said Josh Pike, a partner at the Camp Road store in Hamburg. "They're trying to intimidate us and instill fear, but it's not working."

Pike shared further concerns about the company: "I believe upper management has been doing research on us." Williams visited his store on Saturday night over Labor Day weekend. "I hadn't told her I was a drag queen," Pike said. "She already knew about me. That means they are doing their research on people, so I'm worried. I need a job, but I think at the end of the day, we, the people, need to stand up, need to put our foot down and say that we need what we deserve."

Devyn Goldberg, a barista at the Delaware & Kenmore store, said a recent visit from Williams and other management "felt like spying." According to Goldberg, "They were walking around looking at everything and asking everyone vague questions. My coworkers didn't understand why they were there, and it was weird and frustrating to all of us. I do feel that it was intimidating."

Management's presence among partners in the stores and during break time has disrupted organizing conversations. Goldberg continued: "I was having a conversation with a coworker who was on the fence and that conversation might have led to them signing a union card, and we had to stop because (Rossann and her team) came in."

Sanabria voiced his own experience of personal intimidation from management during their visits. "In my interactions with Rossann I feel she's had me in her sights. From the moment she walked into the listening session, she noticed my union pin, and made very intense eye contact. During my one-on-one conversation after the listening session I attended, she worded things to try and dissuade me from participating in and documenting this campaign."

For Sanabria, this all contributes to a stronger sense of resolve for organizing. "I was kind of surprised at how immediately partners at my store, the Transit Commons location, were on board. I'm impressed and excited with the conversations I've had with the partners at my store."

Cook from the Walden & Anderson store shared similar enthusiasm. "I am very excited to be filing at my store. I believe our store will benefit significantly from a union. We have had 95% turnover from the time that I started a little less than a year ago. The enthusiasm is high among my partners to finally have an equal partnership."



The filings are part of a far-reaching movement of Buffalo area Starbucks partners under the name SBWorkersUnited, who have the goal of establishing the first union-contracted, corporate-owned Starbucks retail stores in the United States. Starbucks currently operates over 8,000 retail stores around the country, none of which are represented by a union contract.

On August 23rd, an organizing committee of over 50 Buffalo-area Starbucks partners sent a letter to Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson demanding meaningful partnership in the operation of their stores and non-interference in the union election process. The committee has since grown. They have yet to receive a response from the CEO.

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