



Atlantic City Casino Workers Need a Raise

Through decades of organizing and collective bargaining, UNITE HERE Local 54 has achieved a middle-class standard for casino workers in Atlantic City. This middle-class standard is now threatened by the skyrocketing cost of living and the continuing impacts of the pandemic.

Our message is simple: **Casino workers need a raise.**



Executive Summary

This report finds:

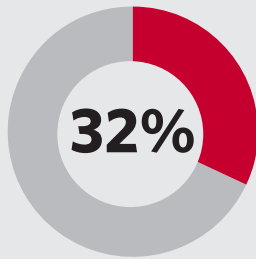
- According to a survey of 1,934 Atlantic City casino workers in March and April 2022:
 - 61% of respondents reported that they struggled to pay their rent or mortgage on time at least once in the past year.
 - When asked, “In the past year, have you ever lacked the money to cover any of the following expenses?” 32% reported they lacked money for food, 37% for utilities, and 27% for transportation.
- Despite increases to the minimum wage, many casino workers’ pay has not kept up with the rising cost of living.
 - According to the MIT Living Wage calculator, the current living wage in Atlantic County for one adult with no children is \$18.83 per hour.
 - As of March 2022, the average wage at the three Atlantic City casinos operated by Caesars Entertainment was approximately \$15.81 per hour for non-tipped workers and \$8.80 for tipped workers. The lowest wage for non-tipped workers was \$13 per hour, the current state minimum wage for most New Jersey workers.
- Inflation is rising. According to the Consumer Price Index for the Middle Atlantic Region, on average, \$100 worth of food in March 2021 now costs \$108.1. \$100 worth of gas in March 2021 now costs \$145.6. According to HUD, the Fair Market Rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Atlantic County increased by 7.8%, or \$1,224 per year, from 2020 to 2022.
- Peak season is approaching in Atlantic City and the casino industry is facing a labor shortage with 2,500 positions unfilled. Current wages have not attracted and retained enough workers as other employers have raised starting wages.
- Even though the Atlantic City casino industry is enjoying rising gaming revenues and profits, workers are being left behind. In 2021, the industry reported total gross operating profits of \$766.8 million, up 25% from 2019. However, total employment in the Atlantic City casino industry was down 22% in July 2021 compared to July 2019.

Casino Workers Struggle to Cover Basic Expenses

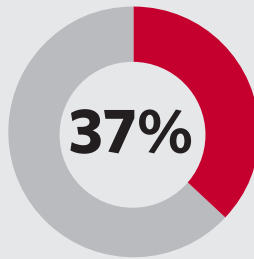
In March and April 2022, UNITE HERE Local 54 conducted a survey of 1,934 Atlantic City casino workers from all nine casinos. The results reveal that casino workers struggled during the past 12 months to cover the cost of necessities including housing, food, utilities, and transportation.

61% of respondents reported that they struggled to pay their rent or mortgage on time at least once in the past year.

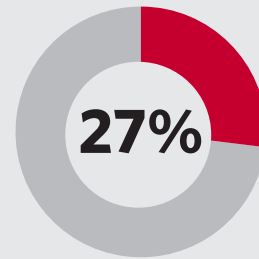
When asked, “In the past year, have you ever lacked the money to cover any of the following expenses?”



of respondents reported they lacked money for food



of respondents reported they lacked money for utilities



of respondents reported they lacked money for transportation

“I have to buy less because I need to pay the rent and utilities. If I don’t, I will get my services cut. Electricity and gas have increased. The rent also increased. Food is super expensive, so I try to eat once per day. I am a cancer survivor and when I was ill with cancer, I applied to the state for help. The state did not give me any help. Supposedly, what I earn is enough to live on but that is not true.”

—FABIOLA SARMIENTO, housekeeper at Harrah’s



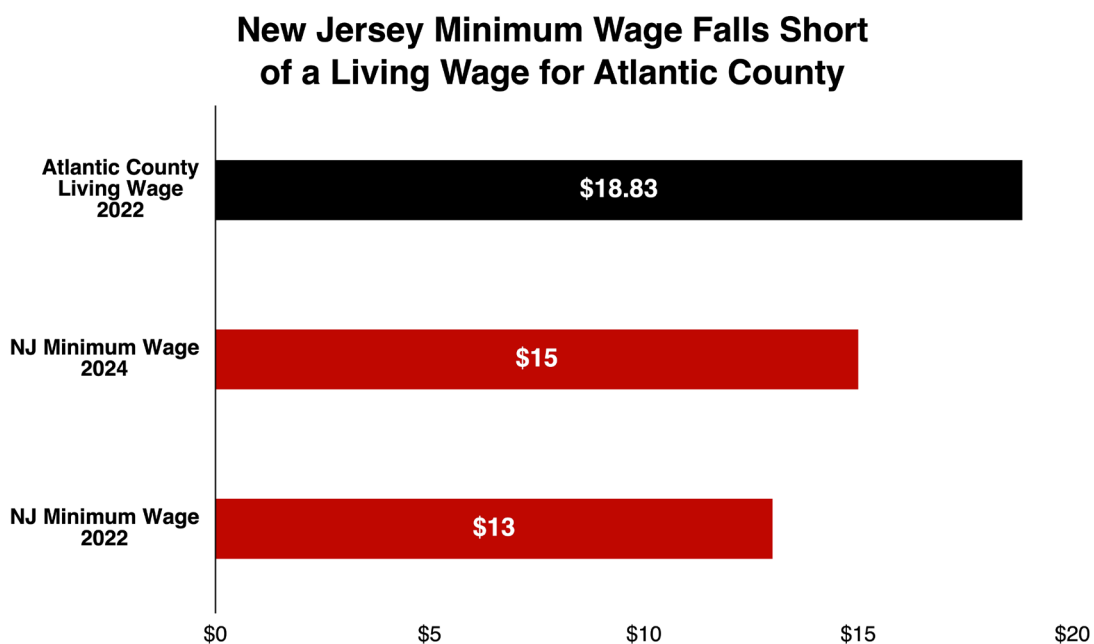
“Right now, all my bills are through the roof because I was out in the pandemic and then the unemployment finished. All my bills are high. I’m paying \$1,525 for rent. Before I used to go food shopping. Not anymore. What I do is today I buy something to eat in the street. Maybe the next day I go buy something to cook that day. I cannot go do food shopping because I don’t have money to do food shopping. We eat day-by-day.”

—MARIA SANTANA, housekeeper at Borgata

Despite Minimum Wage Increases, Some Casino Workers' Pay Falls Short of a Living Wage

In 2019, New Jersey enacted landmark legislation to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 for most workers in the state.¹ Governor Murphy stated that the purpose of the minimum wage increase was to “ensure that hardworking people across our state are paid a living wage.”² In January 2022, the minimum wage rose to \$13 per hour for most workers, including casino workers. It will increase to \$14 per hour in January 2023 and \$15 per hour in 2024.

Despite the recent increases, the minimum wage still falls short of a living wage in Atlantic County. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, the current living wage in Atlantic County for one adult with no children is \$18.83 per hour, nearly \$6 more than the current minimum wage.³ The MIT Living Wage Calculator, created by Professor Amy Glasmeier, is a widely used measure of living wage at the county level based on the costs of food, childcare, health, housing, transportation, and other basic necessities.



Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator

Caesars Entertainment, which operates Caesars, Harrah's, and Tropicana, is the largest employer in the Atlantic City casino industry.⁴ As of March 2022, average wages at Caesars' three Atlantic City casinos were approximately \$15.81 per hour for non-tipped workers and \$8.80 for tipped workers.⁵ The lowest wage for non-tipped workers was \$13 per hour, the current New Jersey minimum wage.⁶ Approximately 13.6% of non-tipped Caesars workers were paid the state minimum.

Through decades of collective bargaining, UNITE HERE Local 54 has achieved contracts that greatly improved the economic stability of union casino workers and their families. However, the rising costs of basic necessities including food, housing, and transportation are creating economic hardship.

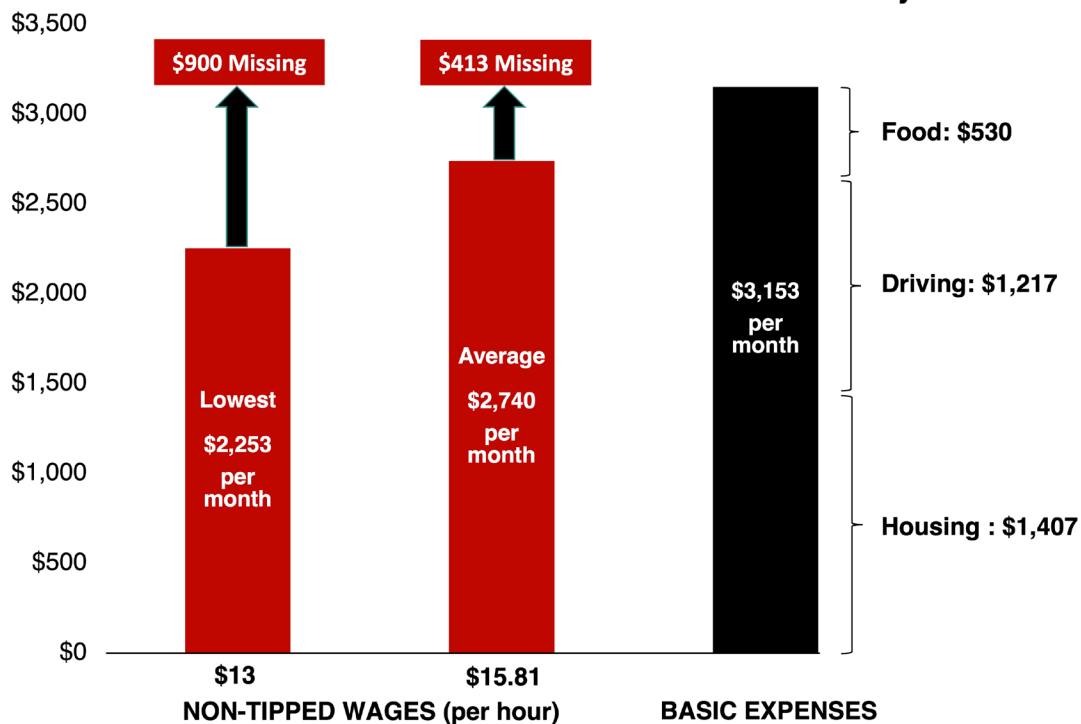
How do current wages at Caesars stack up to the cost of basic expenses in Atlantic County?

Each workers' situation is unique. As a hypothetical example, consider the following estimated housing, transportation, and food expenses for an adult with one school-aged child in Atlantic County for one month:

- According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Atlantic County is \$1,407 per month.⁷
- According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, the total cost of driving in Atlantic County, including gas at a price of \$4.10, insurance, car payments, and car use, is approximately \$1,217 per month.⁸
- According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), a low-cost food plan for one adult and one child, which assumes that all meals are prepared at home, costs approximately \$530 per month.⁹

A Caesars worker earning the average non-tipped wage of \$15.81 per hour and working full-time hours would have a pre-tax income of \$2,740 per month, falling \$413 short of those hypothetical expenses for housing, driving, and food. A Caesars worker earning the minimum wage of \$13 per hour and working full-time hours would fall \$900 short. This example does not include any other expenses, such as a phone, internet access, childcare, or school supplies.¹⁰

Caesars Entertainment's Wages are Not Keeping Pace with the Cost of Basic Needs in Atlantic County



Sources: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Center for Neighborhood Technology, US Department of Agriculture

As of March 2022, approximately 43% of non-tipped workers at Caesars Entertainment in Atlantic City are being paid less than the average wage of \$15.81 per hour.

The Cost of Living is Rising for Atlantic City Casino Workers

In the Middle Atlantic region, the average cost of consumer goods increased 3.3 times faster in March 2022 compared to the prior twelve-month period, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index (CPI).¹¹

	Percent increase in CPI for twelve months ended March 2022	Percent increase in CPI for twelve months ended March 2021	Comparison
All items ¹²	7.2%	2.2%	3.3 times greater
Food ¹³	8.1%	3.2%	2.5 times greater
Gas ¹⁴	45.6%	18.4%	2.5 times greater
Housing ¹⁵	5.3%	1.7%	3.1 times greater

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Comparing the CPI in March 2021 and March 2022:

- \$100 worth of food in March 2021 costs \$108.1 now
- \$100 worth of gas in March 2021 costs \$145.6 now

In Atlantic County, housing is the most expensive necessity for most households. The yearly Fair Market Rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Atlantic County increased by 7.8%, from 2020 to 2022, according to HUD.¹⁶ The yearly Fair Market Rent for a 3-bedroom apartment increased by 13%, or \$2,724 per year, in the same period.¹⁷

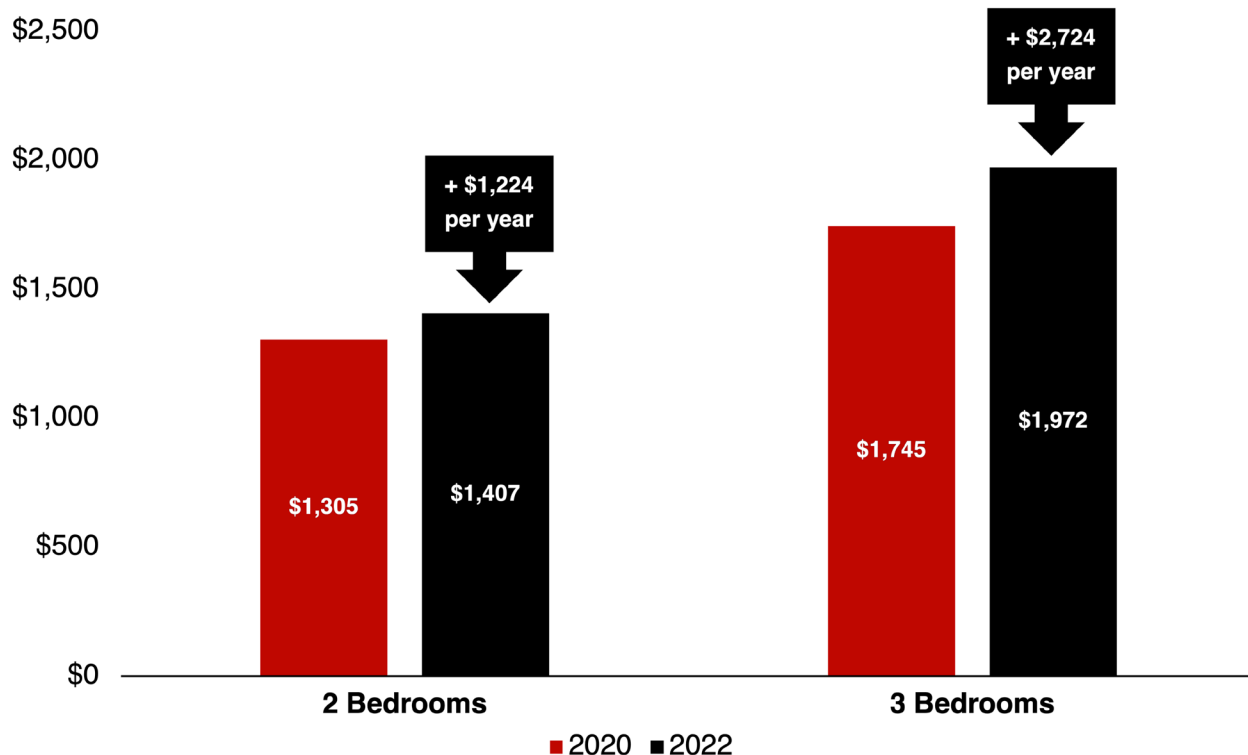
For Amancia De Los Santos, a housekeeper at Borgata, rent increased recently from \$1,090 to \$1,200 per month, increasing the amount of rent she pays per year by \$1,320. With her hourly pay rate of \$16.50 as of March 2022, it would take 80 additional hours of work per year to cover this increase.¹⁸



"My pay is not enough because everything has gone up. I have tried to spend less, economize, so I have enough for expenses. I try to economize on electricity and water. My electricity, gas, and rent costs have increased. I used to pay \$1,090 for rent and now I pay \$1,200. The rent went up with the new lease."

—AMANCIA DE LOS SANTOS, housekeeper at Borgata

Fair Market Rent (FMR) Increased in Atlantic County from 2020 to 2022



Source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development

According to the most recent American Community Survey data from the Census Bureau, as of 2020, the cost burden for renters in Atlantic County as a portion of income was higher than the national average. 55% of Atlantic County renting households pay 30% or more of their income for rent,¹⁹ which HUD describes as “cost burdened.”²⁰ Nationally, the number is 9% lower than Atlantic County.

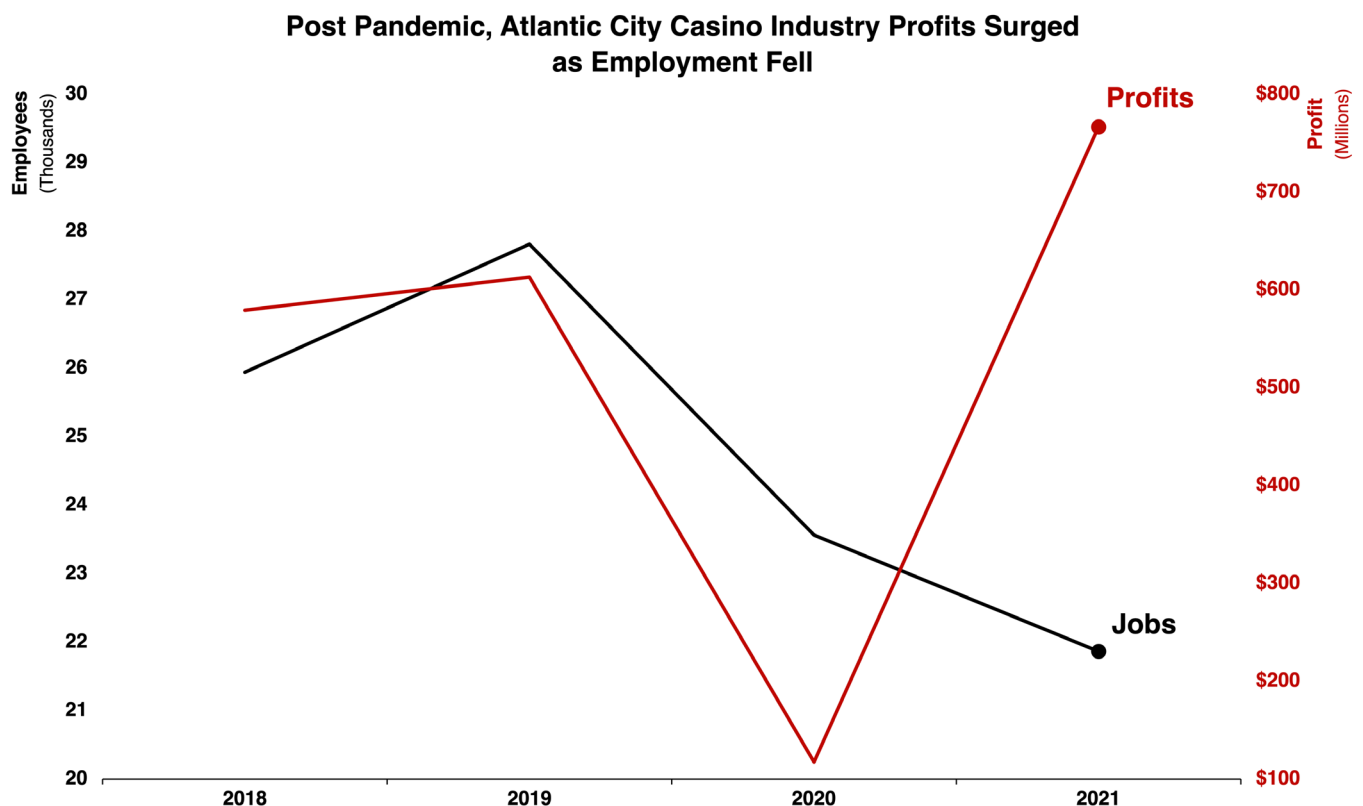
In addition to renters, homeowners have also experienced hardship. Homeowners in Atlantic City have faced a long-term decline in the average property value while property taxes have increased. In 2008, the average property value was \$258,764.²¹ In 2021, it had decreased to \$122,761,²² a loss of 52.5%. During the same period, property taxes increased by 11.2%.²³

Casino Industry Profits are Up, But Workers are Waiting for Good Jobs

The Atlantic City casino industry’s gaming revenues and profits have recovered dramatically, surpassing 2019 pre-pandemic levels. In 2021, total gaming revenue was \$4.2 billion, an increase of 28% compared to 2019.²⁴ 2021 was the first year since 2008 with total gaming revenues exceeding \$4 billion.²⁵ Last year, the industry reported total gross operating profits of \$766.8 million, up 25%

from 2019. In 2021, brick-and-mortar casino gaming revenue recovered to 95% of pre-pandemic 2019 levels.²⁶ In the first three months of 2022, brick-and-mortar casino gaming revenue rose to 103% of pre-pandemic 2019 levels, an increase of 24% compared to the same three-month period in 2021.²⁷

While the industry enjoyed rising profits, workers suffered falling employment levels. According to the Division of Gaming Enforcement (DGE), total employment in the Atlantic City casino industry was 22,672 in July 2021, a decline of 22% compared to 29,141 jobs reported in July 2019.²⁸



Note: The New Jersey DGE did not report employment figures for March-June 2020. Average employment for 2020 was calculated based on the eight reported months of January-February and July-December.

Source: New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement

Casino workers in Atlantic City worked the frontlines during the worst of the pandemic. They kept the industry going through an unprecedented crisis. Casinos now produce massive profits with fewer employees shouldering heavier workloads.

The Industry Faces a Labor Shortage and Must Raise Wages to Keep Pace with Other Employers

As of April 2022, the Atlantic City casino industry needed another 2,500 workers heading into peak season. Filling these positions will be vital to the industry's success this summer.²⁹

When asked "How often in the past year has your shift/department/outlet/section/area been 'short staffed'?" 66% of 1,934 surveyed casino workers responded at least three days per week, according to Local 54's survey conducted in March and April 2022.

Current wage levels in the casinos are failing to attract and retain a sufficient workforce, as casino operators fail to keep pace with rising wages from other employers.

"I started working at Bally's when I was 18 and I have been working there for 24 years. My husband works at Walmart. He's only been there four years. He started at \$11 and now he's at \$17.50. He gets paid more than I do."

—JESSICA SANCHEZ, housekeeper at Bally's



As of late April/early May, other Atlantic County employers were offering start rates ranging from \$15 to \$22 per hour.³⁰



Photos taken on April 30, 2022 at Wawa (4262 E Black Horse Pike, Mays Landing, NJ 08330) and ShopRite (3003 E Black Horse Pike, Egg Harbor Township, NJ 08234)

Company	Job Title	Location in Atlantic County	Pay per hour
Grocery and Convenience Stores			
Wawa	Not specified	Mays Landing	starting at \$15
Aldi	Associate	Egg Harbor Township	\$16.50 ³¹
Casel's Marketplace	Produce Clerk	Margate City	\$15 to \$17 ³²
ShopRite	Not specified	Egg Harbor Township	up to \$17
Lidl	Associate	Egg Harbor Township	\$17 ³³
Cleaning			
NJ Transit	Cleaner	Egg Harbor Township	\$17.10 ³⁴
Shore Natural Cleaning Services	Cleaner	Egg Harbor Township	\$17 to \$22 ³⁵
Other Examples			
Faneuil	Toll Collector	Mays Landing	\$15 ³⁶
Atlantic Coast Moving & Storage	Mover	Egg Harbor Township	\$18 to \$22 ³⁷
Penn-Jersey Building Materials	Yard Worker	Egg Harbor Township	\$20.15 ³⁸

Conclusion

Wages must move up in the Atlantic City casino industry to keep pace with the cost of living and to solve the labor shortage. Industry leaders should work cooperatively with workers in upcoming negotiations to face these challenges. The time has come for a substantial increase in the wage floor. As we recover from the worst of the pandemic, we must ensure that no one is left behind.

For more information contact L. Tchernyshyov, (702) 277-6273, ltchernyshyov@unitehere.org

UNITE HERE Local 54 Atlantic City has been representing hospitality workers in the hospitality industry for over 100 years. Our members work as housekeepers, bartenders, cocktail servers, cooks, bellmen, doormen, and other service jobs in the casinos and hospitality industry of South Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. With over 10,000 members, Local 54 is the largest private sector union in the region. Local 54 is an affiliate of UNITE HERE, an international labor union that represents 300,000 working people across North America.

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