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# Starbucks union in Ithaca protests store's closure and calls for a boycott

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Starbucks' lawyers met twice with the unionized workers of the Ithaca store to offer them the option of applying to transfer to another location after announcing the store closure. However, the company would not guarantee the workers' jobs moving forward, leaving them scrambling with little to no job security.

*Justin Sullivan/Getty Images*

Starbucks Workers United community members and partners gathered at the entrance of the Starbucks on College Avenue in Ithaca, New York, on June 8 to protest the company's decision to permanently close the store this Friday.

This decision has left workers with less than a week's notice and resulted in them calling for a boycott of other Starbucks stores around the city.

Starbucks' lawyers met twice with the unionized workers of the store to offer them the option of applying to transfer to another location. However, the company would not guarantee the workers' jobs moving forward, leaving them scrambling.

Cornell student Alayna Earl, who is a member of the union, has been working as a barista for two years at the store, which is the closest Starbucks to campus.

Most Cornell students don't have cars, she said, so even if they are transferred to another store, workers who are also students would face the challenge of getting to and from work.

Though unable to attend the protest, Earl sat in on the second bargaining meeting between unionized workers and lawyers on Wednesday. She said the conversation went in circles, with lawyers reiterating that they would not reopen the store anytime soon. Along with not being guaranteed transfers, the lawyers told the workers that they could not guarantee the same hours.

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"One thing that we're worried about is if we transfer to a different store that already has a fully staffed team, are we still gonna get the same amount of hours that we've been getting at our old store?" Earl said.

Questions remain as to why the College Avenue store had to close, as Starbucks refused to provide company data on the decision. Starbucks did not respond to NPR's request for comment.

During the Wednesday meeting, Earl said that the reasoning provided by the lawyers didn't resonate with her or the workers.

"They said things like ... our efficiency wasn't up to par, and they wanted to improve the customer and barista experience. But we weren't consulted. They didn't ask whether our store was efficient for us, it was kind of based on Starbucks standards, but then they weren't really going over what the standards entailed," she added.

Earl said that to her, the coffee shop has been integral to Cornell's campus, with customers coming in and out all the time for coffee and to study, which sparked even more confusion among workers regarding its closing.

"A lot of us were confused [as to] why it was closing so suddenly because [the lawyers] said things about us not being efficient, or closing for business needs. But it's the most profitable store in Ithaca because of how close it is to Cornell's campus and because of how many students visit that store each day," Earl said.

Workers speculate that the store's closing is in retaliation for their unionization.

Two months ago, the College Avenue store had achieved a historic victory after it became unionized on the same day as the other two stores in Ithaca, making national headlines as the first city to have all unionized Starbucks stores.

Out of the three stores, the workers at the College Avenue location were the most vocal when it came to demanding what they labeled as fair treatment and a quality work environment. On April 19, they had held a strike due to a broken, overflowing grease

trap in the store.

The workers now believe that this, along with their historic unionization, angered Starbucks leaders and provoked them to close the store.

"College Avenue was a pretty vocal store in terms of unionizing. I think that people were having issues with us voicing our concerns and actually speaking up. I think rather than addressing our needs, they closed the store with little to no notice," Earl said.

Though the next steps are still unclear, Earl said that she and others hope to get their old store back and job security. At the least, they hope for fair working conditions and for their voices to be heard. The boycott has received much support not only from local workers, but also from Starbucks unions across the country via social media.

"We do feel supported by other Starbucks workers. I think that all the stores in Ithaca have a tight-knit community, and we are willing to support each other if we notice that something isn't being done correctly, or being done fairly," Earl said.

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