

Box Partners: Poverty Wages, Intimidation, and Union Busting

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Charlesbank Equity Fund IX owns Box Partners. Charlesbank Capital Partners bought the company in 2021 and brought in Neil Thomas as the CEO, who previously led Charlesbank Fund VII portfolio company Trojan Battery. Box Partners is a wholesaler of shipping supplies and operates a distribution center in Elgin, Illinois.

Box Partners workers voted overwhelmingly to join LIUNA Local 681 (75 to 34, 69%) at its Elgin, Illinois facility in September 2024. Over 60% of Box Partners workers make a base pay between \$16.88 and \$18.77. Working 40 hours a week at the rate of \$18.77, that equals \$39,042 per year. \$38,680 is the poverty line for a family of 5 in the US.

Moreover, the workers' health benefits are unaffordable. The cheapest, high-deductible health plan costs almost \$1,200 per year for employee-only coverage. In that cheapest, high-deductible health plan, employees would have to pay more than \$17,000 per year to provide health coverage for their families. That's almost 44% of a \$39,042 salary.

While Box dragged out bargaining for over a year, refusing to give workers the raise and affordable health benefits that they deserve, an employee supported by the notoriously anti-union National Right to Work Foundation filed to decertify the Union.

That decertification vote was held on March 26th, 2026. Box workers once again voted for their union, (55 to 41, 57%). This 2nd vote, taken after another round of anti-union meetings and messaging from Box management, proves that workers are standing strong together to fight for livable wages, affordable healthcare, and respect for all workers.

According to records filed with the US Department of Labor, Box Partners spent \$197,916 in 2 months on union busters in 2024. Box Partners paid union busting firm The Labor Pros \$425/hour (plus travel & expenses), and 2 other union busters \$75/hour (plus travel & expenses). 2025 LM-20's for Box Partners have yet to be filed.

Box Partners management is also continuing its campaign to intimidate workers who stand up for their rights. On February 26th, 2026, an unfair labor practice was filed against Box Partners alleging a supervisor threatened to report employees to immigration enforcement in retaliation for their union activity.

Workers are also under extreme pressure to perform. Instead of hiring full-time, qualified workers, Box Partners management is hiring temporary workers. Box Partners worker David Romero says, "Box Partners hiring unskilled, untrained temporary workers is making it harder to do our jobs. When I have to stop what I am doing in order to teach a short-term temporary worker what to do, it makes me less productive."

Box Partners workers have had to stand up to these tactics for more than a year and a half to fight for their union and a first collective bargaining agreement. The NLRB is still investigating an unfair labor practice charge filed back in 2024 while workers were organizing, alleging that the employer was threatening that it would newly check worker immigration status if they voted for the union.

Even a casual observer of the behavior of Box Partners can see that the company is seeking to exploit these poverty-level workers and intimidate them from standing up for their rights. This injustice cannot be solved by Box Partners owner Charlesbank putting a new policy on its website. It will only be solved by Charlesbank getting fully involved in bargaining and coming to the table with an offer that lifts workers out of poverty and allows them to afford health insurance.

A statement from a Zoom meeting with Charlesbank investors from Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs said it best, "I want to state fairly clearly to start things out with, what Charlesbank is doing to workers at Box Partners in Elgin is not only reckless, it's simply wrong. Full stop. When Charlesbank mistreats its workers at Box Partners, when it dismisses their organizing efforts, when it denies them their dignity, Charlesbank also is hurting its investors. Workers who are engaged increase productivity, workers who are respected increase productivity, workers who are valued increase productivity. Greater productivity leads to higher profit margins, greater return on investment, and more success. Workers who are pushed aside hurt the bottom line. Workers who are dismissed hurt the bottom line. And workers who are ignored hurt the bottom line. When that happens, investors lose faith. They look for other opportunities for their capital, and everyone suffers."

In order to assure that workers at Box Partners receive the contract they deserve and that investors in Charlesbank are protected against any further potential federal labor law violations or spending on union busters, managers of the Box Partners portfolio at Charlesbank must get involved in the contract negotiations between LIUNA Local 681 and Box Partners. Investors in Charlesbank should call their client services representative at Charlesbank and demand an immediate briefing on the labor disputes at Box Partners. Investors should insist that Charlesbank fund managers directly intervene in the current contract negotiations between Box Partners management and LIUNA Local 681. Investors must demand a fair contract with Box Partners in Elgin, Illinois that establishes livable wages and affordable healthcare options to stabilize the workforce, restore operational efficiency, and protect investor returns.