

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – In what riders and workers are calling an assault on working families, The Rapid Board appeared to decide Wednesday night to deny its employees a contract extension while proposing a salary raise for CEO Peter Varga and a whopping 16.1% fare hike on riders. In a letter sent by the agency to the union on Thursday afternoon, the Board's decision remains a mystery. However, the agency states that it intends to "[terminate] the parties' collective bargaining agreement" if the union does not submit to its demands.

RiChard Jackson, President of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 836, denounced the moves: "Let's call it what it is: robbery. A bunch of out-of-touch Board members proposed a fare hike that would make riding a bus in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as expensive as riding one in Washington, DC. They rubber stamped a plan to steal retirement security from their own employees. And they proposed giving a CEO who already makes \$200,000 another raise. They are literally stealing from the poor and middle class to give to the rich."

Varga and The Rapid's management team have threatened multiple times to terminate the pension plan for workers when the current contract extension expires on August 29th. The union had hoped that the Board members would take a more rational approach and at least extend the contract to allow for further negotiations. Their failure to do so puts both parties in uncharted territory and will likely raise the stakes in the three-month long standoff.

On Tuesday, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order against the agency after it violated the workers' First and Fourteenth Amendment rights by threatening to arrest or discipline off-duty employees who distributed literature about the negotiations. An order on a preliminary injunction is expected tonight or Friday morning.

"Last night's meeting and today's letter prove what we've been saying all along," Jackson continued. "The Rapid management feels that they're so financially sound that they can justify increasing the salary and benefits of a CEO who already makes \$200,000 per year. So why jack up fares on riders? Why terminate the retirement plans of workers? This clearly isn't about finances. It's about intimidation and control. They call this 'Beer City?' We might as well call it 'Fear City'."