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Worker and Community Groups Call on COMIDA to End Tax Break Deal With Company for Job Shifting

COMIDA's tax deal with VWR is central focus for reform advocates across New York

Rochester, NY – Worker and community groups rallied outside the County of Monroe IDA (COMIDA) to urge its board to rescind the tax abatement agreements it has with Ward's Natural Science, a subsidiary of VWR Education LLC. Pressure is mounting on COMIDA to rescind their tax deal with VWR. The company has become a central focus for reform advocates across New York – with online actions targeting COMIDA launched across the state last week.

The advocates from Monroe and Erie County attended the COMIDA board meeting at noon to present statements that VWR has engaged in shifting jobs from one part of the state to another, instead of creating new jobs and will call on COMIDA to take action to end its agreement with VWR. IDAs are prohibited from funding projects that shift jobs within the state.

“We are proud to stand with our community allies to oppose tax give-aways to the richest corporations” said Gene Delorme, President of Joint Council 46.

“VWR has been doing deals with Erie County IDA to avoid paying their fair share of taxes since the 1970's” said Richard Lipsitz, political affairs coordinator for the Teamsters Joint Council 46 and WNY Area Labor Federation president. “What they've promised in return – JOBS. But, just as they've done in other parts of the country, the minute the tax break ran dry they shut down the jobs. They've likely had this plan for years, because they've been racking up tax breaks in Monroe County since 2001, expanding their warehouse there in preparation for the Tonawanda shutdown. It is time for COMIDA to end its agreement with VWR.”

VWR, which recorded \$3.6 billion in sales in 2010, is an international distributor of scientific and laboratory supplies and chemicals and is owned by Chicago-based private equity firm Madison Dearborn Partners.

VWR's pattern of job piracy extends beyond New York. In Brisbane, CA VWR plans to close its warehouse, putting over 60 long-term employees out of work and plans to build a new warehouse 300 miles away in Visalia, CA, where it is eligible for multiple incentives and tax credits. VWR's move was subject to a Commission of Inquiry led by Congresswoman Jackie Speier and State Treasurer Bill Lockyer.

“VWR is and all too common example of how corporations have gamed the system,” said James Bertolone, Rochester and Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation president. “As we struggle with ongoing unemployment, an urban poverty crisis, struggling schools, and cuts to critical programs from health care to highway repair, it is time to ensure that corporations start paying their fair share and start delivering on the good jobs they promise – otherwise we need our money back. VWR has not created the good jobs they promised, which is why we are calling on COMIDA to end its agreement with VWR.”

“It is time to bring some sanity to the rest of our jobs and economic development programs,” said Allison Duwe, Coalition for Economic Justice executive director. “If we don’t we will continue to give away money and get nothing in return. We will continue to face an assault on the public investments that are critical to a healthy economy – public transit, education, health care, infrastructure, and on and on.”

“We’re not opposed to helping companies succeed by providing subsidies,” said Paula Hansen, Metro Justice board president. “But those subsidies need to be used to help build a better future for our community, not to line the pockets of Ward’s and their private equity firm owners or keep a slew of lawyers, consultants, and lobbyists employed doing deal after deal with whoever comes asking.”

Coalition members participating in the rally included the Coalition for Economic Justice, Metro Justice, Citizen Action, Alliance for Quality Education, WNY Area Labor Federation, Rochester and Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation, Teamsters Joint Council 46, Occupy Rochester, Occupy Buffalo.