

The Communicator

PEF

March 2021



Don't slash services
during a **mental health crisis**



Office of
Mental Health

Table of Contents

The President’s Message	3
Don’t slash services during a mental health crisis	5
PEF, CSEA members protest closure of Rockland Children’s Psychiatric Center	6
COVID-19 Scorecard	7
Rash of violent attacks by people with mental illness underscores need for funding, services	8
PEF mental health professionals talk real repercussions of slashing budget, closing facilities	10
PEF urges legislators to reject budget proposals cutting services and reducing staff at DOH	12
NYS unions demand tax fairness to support economic reboot	14
PEF to legislators: Invest in your workforce, not in contractors	16
PEF opposes OCFS consolidation, closures at budget hearing	19
Union Membership May Be Down, ‘Interest In Labor Unions Appears To Be On The Rise.’	20
Cancer brings value of PEF contract benefits into sharp focus	21
Former PEF VP Ken Robertson dies	22
Letters to the Editor	23
Retirees in Action: Speak up now to save our retiree health benefits	24
Saluting members on their retirements	25
Leave Donations: Ailing members need your leave donations	26
Photo Highlights	27

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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



One Year Later, PEF is Still Doing It

This month marks the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic. One year since the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus a pandemic. One year since states began issuing stay-at-home directives. And one year since Governor Cuomo issued his "New York on Pause" executive order. Of course, tens of thousands of you never got a break and still haven't had one, 12 months into the greatest public health crisis New York has ever seen.

The last year has been filled with hardships. We've all lost loved ones and friends. Many of you have worked out-of-title supporting the pandemic response effort, and members on the various front lines of the fight — from hospitals to congregate care settings to correctional facilities and many more — have spread yourselves so thin and given so much to help fellow New Yorkers in their time of need.

I am deeply grateful for the dedication PEF members have demonstrated in the last year. And I am proud of what we were able to accomplish together in support of our union brothers and sisters. We've updated our "[COVID Scorecard](#)" for this issue and some of the numbers are staggering: The union and your donations have contributed more than \$360,000 to the PEF Relief Fund, money that helped purchase 3,056 nights in hotel rooms for members working on the front-lines of the state's COVID response who didn't want to risk infecting their families. We've conducted 350 membership meetings and six virtual town halls in an effort to keep you all informed. And our Organizing and Field Service Departments have held 50 membership appreciation events to recognize members for their tireless work.

Moving into the second quarter of the year, our priorities haven't changed. Our paramount concern is still your health and safety on the job. So as always, let our Health & Safety Department know at HealthAndSafety@pef.org if you see something that doesn't seem right. As the state expands vaccine eligibility, we will continue to push for all PEF members who want a shot to have access to one. And as the state's fiscal situation improves with tens of billions of dollars provided in the latest round of COVID relief, we will ramp up our demands for the state to return to the bargaining table so we can negotiate the fair and just contract you have all earned and so richly deserve.

So as signs of Spring appear across our great state, I wish you all health and happiness. I know I'm not alone in looking forward to hugging loved ones I haven't seen in a year. And when we are once again able to gather in our various committees and councils and conduct the business of this union face-to-face, I can't wait to greet all of you — the proud members of the Public Employees Federation who have exemplified our union's motto this past year: **PEF Does It!**

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wayne Spence
PEF President

As the April 1 budget deadline approaches,

PEF is authoring a series of op-eds for various media outlets across the state fighting back against bad budget proposals. The first two have focused on the mental health crisis. Gov. Cuomo proposed closing Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center, reducing capacity at the Western New York Psychiatric Center by more than 50 percent, and closing 266 beds across the system after already closing 99 beds in the final two months of 2020.

The Legislative and Communications Departments wrote this op-ed on President Spence's behalf that was printed on Feb. 22 in The New York Daily News.

And later this month, the following op-ed will publish in the Gotham Gazette, written in partnership with In the Public Interest, a non-profit group assisting PEF with a campaign to highlight how the public sector is vital to helping New York State fund our future. Future op-eds are planned focusing on the public health crisis and the perils of contracting out work more efficiently and safely performed by state employees.

Don't slash services during a mental health crisis

By WAYNE SPENCE & RANDI DIANTONIO

New Yorkers have been living through the challenging effects of the worldwide pandemic for a year now. Many are suffering from new or aggravated mental health issues stemming from the lockdowns and the pandemic, while those with more chronic mental health issues, developmental disabilities and at-risk youth are facing limited treatment options caused by COVID-19 protocols and fewer state-funded treatment options. As we have seen in recent days with the subway attack in New York City, the failure to provide adequate state support, care and treatment for these individuals ultimately results in unnecessary tragedies. My members, state public employees, see the impact of this pandemic on the New Yorkers they serve daily.

Yet this year's Executive Budget further exasperates an already troubling trend of capacity reductions, service cuts and the elimination of state-sponsored mental health and at-risk youth services in communities across the state. In lieu of increasing taxes by a small amount on billionaires, Gov. Cuomo proposes [eliminating 800 state positions, including 446 positions at the Office of Mental Health \(OMH\) due to attrition](#), cutting nearly 300 inpatient beds for the mentally ill, outsourcing services for people with mental and developmental disabilities and closing several specialized, community-based residential rehabilitation programs for troubled youth.

A simple comparison of the 2010 and 2020 state Workforce Management Reports highlights the trend. Since Cuomo has taken office, staffing at OMH has [declined 17%](#), while staffing levels at the state's Office for People with Developmental Disabilities decreased 15% in that time frame. Overall, the strict hiring freeze the governor credits in his Executive Budget for controlling spending, has resulted in the loss of approximately 5,200 Full-Time Equivalent employees at agencies subject to executive control since the start of the fiscal year through Dec. 2020. [The state workers he has repeatedly singled out as "heroes" of the pandemic](#) are not being replaced when they retire or leave state service and are not incentivized with pay and benefits equivalent to what they can find in the private sector.

We can already see the impact of past cuts to these services in our communities: homeless and destitute veterans, youth and others with mental illness slip through the cracks and are left to scrape together shelter, food and treatment under increasingly more difficult circumstances. Even before the pandemic hit, 10.4% of adults in New York reported having

experienced "serious psychological distress" according to a [2018 study](#) by the Leonard Schaeffer Center for Health and Policy and Economics (LSCHPE). Since then, a [report by the New York State Health Foundation](#) found that 37% of New York residents reported poor mental health during the pandemic with the percentages rising for Hispanic (42%) and African-American (39%) New Yorkers. We also know from a [Sept. 2020 study](#) conducted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene that 14% of city residents reported having unmet needs for mental health services and another 15% reported having difficulty accessing services for their children.

So it's clear that New Yorkers need the services provided by OMH and OPWDD more than ever. But there are other consequences as well. Cuts to mental health and other vital services are not only inhumane; they result in increased pressure and higher costs for county and municipal governments while increasing the burden on the entire criminal justice system. [Another pre-pandemic study](#) by the LSCHPE indicated that 15% of state prison and 26% of municipal jail inmates suffered from "serious psychological distress," numbers far exceeding the non-incarcerated population (5%).

These proposed budget cuts correspond with other proposed cuts in support for local governments and the withholding of payments to private mental health providers. This entire proposal is a house of cards on top of which sit New York's most vulnerable citizens.

A civilized society is measured by the care it affords to its most needy residents, not by the number of billionaires who flourish in it. In this time of crisis, we need to expand the resources available to support state-sponsored mental health and at-risk services so all New Yorkers have access to viable, comprehensive and long-term treatment and rehabilitation options. Look no further than the words of top Cuomo staffer Melissa DeRosa, who in a Feb. 10 call with lawmakers said, "there is a national mental health crisis going on in this country."

That crisis requires a budget that reflects the challenges posed by the pandemic and addresses the long-term, systemic service cuts that have worsened the effects of this pandemic on so many needy and at-risk New Yorkers.

PEF, CSEA members joined by state legislators, town officials to protest closure of Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Citing the impact on New York's most vulnerable children and local communities, as well as the potential loss of jobs, PEF and CSEA leaders stood with state legislators and local officials to protest the state's plan to close Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center (RCPC).

At a press conference on Monday, March 8, PEF President Wayne Spence was joined by CSEA Southern Region President Anthony Adamo and legislative leaders Sen. Elijah Reichlin-Melnick, Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, Sen. James Skoufis, Assemblyman Mike Lawler and Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski, as well as Rockland County Executive Ed Day.

"The mental health needs of adults and children have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and now is not the time to propose cutting services or closing facilities," Spence said. "Despite the Executive Budget pointing to lower utilization, our members say beds are filling up and patients are in need of skilled, inpatient care. RCPC and facilities like it are often the last resource for the state's most vulnerable citizens. Without them, many of these people would be left untreated, which increases their chances of run-ins with the criminal justice system and other social service providers."

RCP provides inpatient services to a large area, covering Rockland, Westchester, Orange, Sullivan, Putnam, Dutchess and Ulster counties, as well as the greater New York City area.

The Executive Budget proposal would shutter RCPC and give the Commissioner of Mental Health the authority to "close, consolidate, reduce, transfer or otherwise redesign services of hospitals, other facilities and programs operated by OMH and to implement significant reductions and reconfigurations." The proposal also seeks to reduce staffing at OMH by 3 percent and OMH has proposed reducing beds and services across the state, including 292 inpatient, youth and forensic psychiatric beds – on top of the 99 beds eliminated in November and December of 2020.



President Wayne Spence speaks to the media in Orangeburg, N.Y., on March 8.

"We believe that regional hospitals continue to seek placements of individuals in the state's psychiatric programs," Spence said. "It seems counterintuitive that during a global public health crisis, fewer persons would require psychiatric support at state facilities."

PEF members can add their voice to the collective call to stop the cutting and consolidation of mental health services. Just visit the union's website to [submit a letter to your local lawmakers on this bad budget proposal](#) and others identified by PEF's Statewide Political Action Committee.



6 FEET APART



3,056 NIGHTS
IN HOTEL ROOMS
FOR MEMBERS



6 VIRTUAL TOWNHALLS

COVID SCORECARD

20,000 MASKS MAILED

5

0

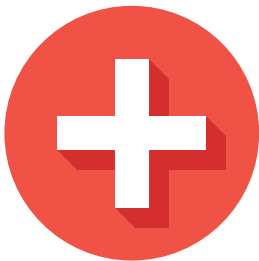
115,000 FACE MASKS DISTRIBUTED



FACE MASK DISTRIBUTION EVENTS

PEF.ORG/COVID

40 MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION EVENTS



15,000+ FRONTLINE/ ESSENTIAL MEMBERS

VIRTUAL CONVENTION

ONE

20 COVID FAQs SHARED



12 LETTERS TO STATE AGENCIES

PEF RELIEF FUND RAISED TO DATE

\$361,626

DONATIONS RECEIVED FROM PEF + OUTSIDE SOURCES

350 MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

WEAR A MASK.



Rash of violent attacks by people with mental illness underscores need for funding, services

By SHERRY HALBROOK

This was the lead paragraph of a story last month in the NY Daily News:

“The brother of a mentally-ill Queens man wanted for questioning in his mother’s machete death issued a desperate plea for sympathy Friday as authorities continue their search for the former NYPD cop.” ([“My brother loved his family’: Sibling of ex-NYPD cop sought in mother’s machete death issues plea for sympathy, says brother is mentally ill”](#) – New York Daily News, Feb. 26)

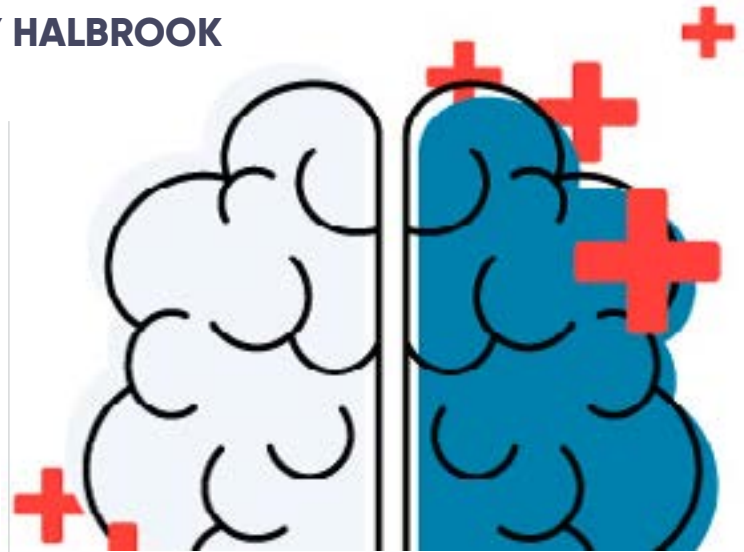
It is a story about a heartbroken family who lost their mother and it is about her son with mental illness who lived with her. They had been trying desperately for more than a year to get more mental health care for him, but it never happened.

“A family member is quoted as saying, “My brother has been suffering from mental illness for many years now, and we have reached out to the mental health department multiple times explaining that we believed our brother was becoming a risk to our mother. I used to tell them, ‘Are you going to wait till he hurts himself or somebody till you do something?’ And their answer was, ‘Unfortunately, that’s the only way.’”

Their tragedy is not isolated. When mentally ill people cannot get the professional care they need, they suffer. Their families suffer. Their friends and employers suffer, and far too often even total strangers in their community suffer too.

This violence is happening in other parts of the state as well. In the small community of Brighton, police are trying to piece together what happened that triggered a deliberate, fatal hit and run. They think the victim may have tried to rob the person who then got into a car and ran him down. In Niagara Falls it is the police, themselves, who are suspect in the death of a mentally ill homeless man whom they were removing from a shelter when he fell or was shoved and received life-ending injuries. The officers are white, the man who died was black.

But in New York City there is no escaping the horrifying stories of violence in the news, sometimes multiple incidents in a day. Many have played out on and around the city’s subway system and have reached the point where people are afraid to ride and the city police and Metropolitan Transit Authority have greatly increased security, at a higher cost to taxpayers just when they can least afford it.



Here are just a sampling of the many violent and sometimes fatal incidents involving mental illness in just the last two months:

- Feb 25, NYC – A 36-year-old man was walking near a federal court house in Manhattan around 6:20 p.m. when he was stabbed in the back with an 8-inch knife. He lost a kidney as a result of the attack and his liver also was damaged. His assailant ran off, but then turned himself in shortly after the attack. Investigators said they believe he is emotionally disturbed. The victim’s wife said, “We are concerned that someone so mentally ill is walking around the city. Why wasn’t he evaluated before this? This could happen to any of us. It could happen to you, your family, anyone. (My husband) is an innocent man who was randomly attacked.” The victim in this case is Asian, and the assailant had just been arrested January 12 for punching another Asian man in the back and throwing him to the ground in Brooklyn.
- Feb 17, NYC – A 46-year-old man began beating a 54-year-old bicyclist with a baseball bat at 5:30 p.m. as the victim was stopped in traffic at the corner of Flatbush and Parkside Aves. A witness implored the assailant to stop the assault and after striking his victim two more times, he left but kept coming back to yell at the victim. The victim was rushed to a hospital in critical condition and had not regained consciousness the next day. Police arrested the assailant, whom they said had been arrested and charged with weapons possession in 2014 while walking a few blocks away with two 15-inch swords dangling from his belt.

- Feb 13, NYC – It was Saturday and four people were randomly stabbed by the same assailant in locations along the A Train line in a 14-hour period. Two of them were found dead. They were all homeless people trying to sleep where they wouldn't freeze to death. The first victim was sitting in a walker at the 181st Street/ Fort Washington Avenue Station. He survived. One of them was sleeping on the stairs inside that same station when he was stabbed four times early that morning. He survived. Two victims were asleep riding the train when they were stabbed to death. At least one of them was a woman. Police arrested a suspect in the stabbing spree that night and he confessed to the murders.
- Jan 17, NYC – A completely naked man appeared on the platform of the Central Park North/110th St. station and began gyrating and dancing next to random people. He pushed a stranger onto the tracks as a train approached. When another man jumped down onto the rails to try to help the shove victim, it enraged the shover, who then also jumped onto the tracks and attacked his original victim and the man who was trying to save him. In the struggle, the shover contacted the electrified third rail and was killed. The other two men were able to get back to the platform without further injury. The shover's mother told the NY Daily News that if her son had been receiving his psychiatric medications he would have been the kind of person who would try to help someone off the tracks. "He has a mental disability and that's the issue. My son is not like that, but because he hasn't had medication in a long time, that's probably why he was acting like that," she said. Before the pandemic, he would receive regular visits from a visiting nurse or mental health professionals to make sure he was keeping up with his medications, she said. "Now, with COVID, it's different, and somebody with a mental illness doesn't believe they have a mental illness."
- Jan 11, NYC – It was about 1:30 p.m. on Sunday when a 39-year-old woman jumped off the roof of a 13-story building in Hell's Kitchen. She was holding her 5-year-old daughter in her arms. They both died, and left the woman's family and friends profoundly shocked and grieved. A neighbor told The Daily News that the woman had seemed stressed at times. "She didn't say, 'I was depressed.' I could just tell. And there really isn't mental health support around here," she said. "I'm so in shock."
- Jan 5, NYC – A 48-year-old man started punching a 74-year-old stranger at a Bronx subway station, and as he punched him, he screamed, "I just feel like punching someone today!" Police said it was his fifth such attack on strangers since August. He had not been jailed for those attacks. He received desk-issued appearance tickets, or was released without posting bail. The NYC Police Chief told WINS that the city's failure to provide adequate mental health and homeless services should bear part of the responsibility for this situation. "We try to

help people who are mentally ill and homeless. But the situation has to improve when we're seeing the people getting arrested over and over again and seeing no improvement."

These are just a few of the violent attacks — many committed in silence against random, unsuspecting victims — that have occurred in New York City in recent weeks and months. They are neither typical criminal behavior, nor are they gang violence. They are neither part of organized crime, nor drug-related.

This violence is being committed by people who may be delusional, and it is hurting people and consuming the time and resources of the MTA, emergency responders and the police. These incidents are undermining trust in public safety, transportation and mental health services. And all of it while the city is still going through massive death, job loss and economic hardship stemming from the pandemic.

Ridership on the MTA is very low, but the number of violent incidents has not dropped proportionately. The MTA asked for 1,000 more transit officers and the city police chief said he would assign 500 more police officers after the random stabbings that killed two and injured two in just 14 hours.

This is what the mother of a 2-year-old child who was punched repeatedly by a female rider on the subway told The Daily News: "I was really scared. (It seems like) nothing is being done. It's crazy. They are still not taking it seriously. I hope they do one day."

PEF President Wayne Spence said he wants state legislators and the governor to understand that this is not just about crime. Clearly the root cause is a lack of mental health services for people who can become dangerous without them.

"PEF members who work in the city are among the millions of people there who are experiencing this stress. Much of this fear, pain and suffering could be avoided if the state owned up to meeting the mental health needs of the people," Spence said. "The money being spent chasing down violent but mentally ill individuals could and should be spent on treating them. Instead, the governor is proposing to cut mental health services. And many legislators are calling for the release of more inmates to parole, releasing defendants without bail, and reduced or no penalties for parolees who violate the terms of their paroles. Some of these measures were put in place last year and more may be coming this year.

"As long as the state ignores the real problem, it will never solve it."

PEF is fighting back against proposed cuts to mental health services in the Executive Budget. [Please visit the Budget Fight Back page](#) on our website to send a letter to your lawmakers opposing closures and bed reductions at OMH.

PEF mental health professionals talk real repercussions of slashing budget, closing facilities

By **KATE MOSTACCIO**

Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 2021-22 Executive Budget proposes staffing and funding cuts at the Department of Mental Health and calls for closures and consolidation of treatment centers for both children and adults.

The governor's budget may save New York State money during a staggering deficit, but these proposals will hurt patients, their families and the communities they serve. PEF leaders who work on the ground in mental health facilities and psychiatric centers know what these proposals really mean for some of New York's most vulnerable.

"Most of the OMH facilities treat patients who have not responded adequately to treatment in the private sector," said PEF Executive Board member Carl Ankrah, a nurse practitioner at Rockland Psychiatric Center. "Cutting these services is going to have significant socio-economic consequences."

Ankrah said the state does need to look at ways to save money, but this is not where it should be done.

"We need to cut cost, but cutting on the backs of patients who have serious mental illness is not the way to go," he said. "In the absence of these services and facilities, patients are going to be sent back into the community without adequate stabilization. In weeks or months, they will end up getting readmitted back to the hospital and further increase the cost we are trying to save."

When these patients are discharged into the community before they are ready, they may get caught up in the criminal justice system or end up homeless. They may hurt someone because of untreated paranoia, not because they are violent by nature, Ankrah said.

Cuts to staffing hinder the work of the agency.

"Treatment for people with mental illness is not a one-size-fits-all," Ankrah said. "Everybody needs individualized care. Without adequate staffing, it is difficult to provide such care. Yes, we



Office of Mental Health

need to retool and contain costs, but cutting the state's mental health workforce at a time when demand for mental health services has gone up is a step in the wrong direction."

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on mental health in our communities.

"People who had no mental illness are now presenting with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)," Ankrah said. "Even before COVID we had a shortage of mental health providers, now this has made it worse."

Many private providers are not accepting insurance right now, Ankrah said, and appointments are often scarce and booking out a month or two.

"All over the country there is a dire need for mental health care," he said. "To cut funding for mental health is one of the worst things the state can do. Mental health is an integral part of our overall health and should be treated as such."

PEF Division 180 Council Leader Vincent Cicatello, a psychiatric nurse 3 at Buffalo Psychiatric Center, shed light on the repercussions of cutting inpatient beds and staffing at psych centers across the state.

"The cuts in beds are obvious cuts in services," Cicatello said. "Each bed reduction is also a decrease in professional staff. Cutting services is a huge mistake."

Cicatello said the governor's budget includes bed reductions based on census data that shows a reduction in use – but he argues that data is misleading.

"Facilities went on pause in November," he said. "Not admitting new patients and discharging patients. We were running below census and not taking anyone in."

But prior to the pause, and since the fall of 2020, things have shifted.

"We are consistently running at a full house," Cicatello said. "I think they are going off charts from when they put themselves on pause. I believe that the numbers are not a true indication of the services actually needed by our population."

Cicatello said youth facilities, like Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center (WNYCPC), are admitting fewer patients because parents are reluctant to send their children to facilities during a global pandemic. That lack of admissions is skewing numbers the governor is using to argue for closures and consolidations.

Increased homelessness and violence are very real consequences of cutting mental health services.

"We see former patients discharged into residences and then the community who are now homeless and panhandling," Cicatello said. "They are asking for money, asking for food. I do think crime is also going to go up. Patients who would normally have a bed to recover now won't have the ability to be hospitalized. It's a huge disservice to patients. The community should be as angry and upset as we are."

"There are not enough mental health services and while they're saying that they are cutting services," he said. "It's going to impact more than just patients and state workers; it's a detriment on the communities themselves."

Patients won't be monitored for medication management, attendance at day programs, proper hygiene, eating and drinking, or seeing their doctors regularly.

"Often there is nobody out there and they might not even realize they need help," Cicatello said.

Mergers and consolidations can force families to send their loved ones even further from home, making visitation difficult, and potentially forcing patient populations to mix, such as youth with adults.

"Rockland (Children's Psychiatric Center) beds would be going to New York City," Cicatello said. "That could cause issues. It depends on the area. And merging adolescents with adults is touchy."

PEF Division 167 Council Leader Stephanie McLean-Beathley, a licensed master social worker at Western NY DDSO, echoed Cicatello's sentiments on reduction of children's psychiatric beds, but took it a step further in surmising that reducing beds might be the state's way to once again attempt closure of WNYCPC.

"WNYCPC has 45 certified beds and they are proposing to cut beds," she said. "We know if those beds are cut they are not going to keep the facility open with only 20 beds. That would be targeted for closure. For five years, WNYCPC fought to keep the center from closing and they were successful. This is an underhanded way to close that facility that serves 19 counties and a large number of people."

Catching mental illness early and treating it can mean the difference between lifelong struggles and quality of life.

"Children's beds are important," McLean-Beathley said. "While children are young, if you are able to diagnose and treat their psychiatric condition, they are much more likely to comply with medication and attend therapy, and the outlook for long-term treatment is more promising."

Closing of comprehensive children's psychiatric treatment at area hospitals has left little other options for the youth surrounding WNYCPC.

"There is a void there and then you are proposing taking away the next layer," McLean-Beathley said. "You can't tell me community-based programs are going to fill the void. Community programs are privatized agencies. These proposals are really taking away from state services."

McLean-Beathley said state staff are highly trained professionals and the state invested in their education. She believes turning to outside providers and closing facilities is wasteful.

"They get all this training to make them good therapists, good aides, and then you turn around and you want to close the facilities where they work," she said. "The staff at psychiatric centers are licensed social workers with a lot of experience. They bring to the table willingness to work and learn new therapies."

The value of psychiatric care during the pandemic can't be brushed aside.

"People who had been hiding under the surface and may have had trouble with anxiety or depression, now they are totally isolated or confined," McLean-Beathley said. "Those symptoms are going to come out much more strongly – and there is no one checking. There are no teachers and staff to look. People are working at home and not interacting with their colleagues."

"When these things start to pop up, you have to have a way to treat them," she said. "Outpatient isn't going to work for everybody. Some of these people are going to need inpatient stays to stabilize them and help get them on the right track."

To support PEF's campaign to fight back on this and other bad budget proposals, [click here](#).



PEF urges legislators to reject budget proposals cutting services and reducing staff at DOH

By KATE MOSTACCIO

PEF submitted testimony on Feb. 25 urging the Legislature to reject budget proposals that would discontinue the indigent care pool to public hospitals and implement interstate licensure, which would allow out-of-state nurses to treat and render services in New York.

The union advocated, instead, that New York invest in its state workforce and improve health care recruitment and retention.

“New York State maintains the most qualified, highest caliber health care workforce in the nation,” PEF President Wayne Spence stated. “Now, we need to implement the strategies needed to attract and retain more people in the health care profession. Unfortunately, this budget proposal does nothing to address these issues.”

Indigent Care Pool

SUNY hospitals – Downstate, Upstate and Stony Brook – provide vital medical education, research and essential health care services to their communities. They serve as specialty care centers, offering top-notch care for burns, trauma and stroke. They are vital to the underserved and less affluent.

Yet, this proposed budget would remove a source of funding from hospitals inundated with patients during a worldwide pandemic.

“The Executive Budget would harm New York’s public hospitals, which were at the forefront of the COVID-19 response,” Spence wrote. “At a time when hospitals, especially those that assist underserved communities, are facing high levels of use and are desperate for additional funding, eliminating this funding source is ill-advised.”

Interstate Licensure Program

The Executive Budget also proposes allowing commissioners of the Office of Mental Health, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Health and the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services to issue regulations to create an interstate licensure program that would allow health care professionals from other states to treat patients in New York.

For years, PEF has urged New York to create a pipeline facilitating the entry of new students into nursing and other programs. PEF strongly opposes outsourcing these health care jobs to workers from other states and instead urges the state to invest in recruitment and retention efforts and bolster state worker ranks.

Recruitment and retention

The need for health care has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, but state facilities and hospitals struggle to recruit and retain staff.

PEF has long argued for base salary increases and benefit incentives to attract skilled professionals to state service.

“Every state agency suffers from recruitment and retention problems for licensed professionals such as nurses, doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurse practitioners,” Spence stated. “These professionals are always in high demand, but this situation has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In lieu of increasing compensation, benefits or improving working conditions, the state has imposed the use of mandatory overtime, the hiring of ‘contract’ nurses and



redeployment of staff to meet critical staffing needs in other agencies or facilities.”

Staffing needs are critical in many state facilities. In the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, some facilities are operating at vacancy rates exceeding 60 percent. Base salary increases and incentives, such as an income tax credit, an annual loan forgiveness program and hazard pay, could go a long way toward recruitment and retention efforts.

“Budgets are about making hard choices,” Spence stated. “We ask that you secure the resources necessary to invest in providing the critical health care and other services all New Yorkers need.”

[Click here for the full testimony.](#)

To send letters to your lawmakers about this bad budget proposal or any of the others PEF has identified as priorities, please [visit this page](#).



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NYS unions demand tax fairness to support economic reboot

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Members of many unions shared their experiences and insights March 1 on how New Yorkers are faring as the COVID-19 pandemic enters its second year. They spoke in a live Labor Revenue Forum streamed by the NYS AFL-CIO through its Facebook page.

Their overarching message: Everyone should contact their elected state representatives and tell them to invest in state and local services, infrastructure and people. Spending cuts will not get New York out of the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic, but making the wealthiest citizens pay their fair share can make it happen

It's a platform supported by PEF, which is fighting for revenue enhancements like a billionaire's tax, while also organizing to reduce wasteful spending and stop service cuts across the state, from bed reductions at OMH to closures of OCFS facilities and the use of expensive consultants at ITS and DOT. (Visit our [Budget Fight Back](#) page to contact your lawmakers in support of PEF's priorities.)

As the forum's moderator Ryan Delgado of the state AFL-CIO said in a Facebook post about the forum: "Working people have borne the brunt of the pandemic with their lives and livelihoods, and unless New York raises revenue to fund vital services they will be the victim of the crisis once again."

Ron Deutsch from New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness said that considering New York has the greatest level of income inequity of any state, it should raise taxes on its wealthiest citizens. Decades of disinvestment in people, services and infrastructure have run parallel to an explosion of wealth for some state residents.

What's more, Deutsch said, New York has one of the largest numbers of billionaires in the country (118), but every time someone suggests raising taxes on the extremely wealthy, they are told these people will flee the state. He said that simply isn't true.

"We did it in 2009 and after 9/11 in 2001 and the number of millionaires has doubled," Deutsch said.

Courtney Smith of New York State United Teachers said she was teaching children with severe learning disabilities in Roosevelt, N.Y., but lost her job last September because of low enrollment at the school.

"My former students are not receiving the services they need," Smith said.

Desma Reeves, a health care worker and member of the Service Employees International Union's local 1199, talked about how understaffed and unprepared her workplace was to face the COVID-19 crisis.

"It was so stressful. Staff wasn't informed what was going on and every day people just left because they didn't know what to expect," she said. Reeves is one of many who cut back her hours from full-time to part-time.

Dangerous short staffing, and not enough PPE and other needed equipment were issues raised by Debbie Hayes of the Communication Workers of America District 1.

"Patients died in New York State because we were not prepared for the pandemic. Our health care system has been cut to the bone in this state and our facilities were already on



the verge of collapse. Some nurses had seven to 10 COVID patients on a shift. We are at a critical point in our history," Hayes said. "We can't cut our way out of this deficit. There's nothing left to cut. We have to face this crisis head on and we have to raise revenue from our wealthiest New Yorkers."

Bev Healey of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) said the pandemic has revealed the stark economic disparities between rich and poor, especially those disparities affecting women, and black and brown women most of all. They have lost their jobs or had their working hours reduced, and many have had to stay home to care for children who were suddenly at home every day, instead of in their classrooms.

"A lot of the ground they have gained has taken a step backward," Healey said, "and it will have a long lasting impact on our economy." If the state fails to make the richest people pay their fair share, "we'll see a rise in poverty and in the physical and mental strain on workers."

Danny DiClemente of the American Federation of County and Municipal Employees talked about workers in food service and security for the Rochester School District who were laid off, and even the few who held onto their jobs had their hours "slashed in half."

"They live paycheck to paycheck. They can't afford to be laid off. The bottom 95 percent of earners pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes, than the top 5 percent. That needs to change," DiClemente said.

New York State Nurses Association member Jayne Camissa said hospitals and other health care facilities were "already in a very deep hole" when the pandemic hit New York a year ago. "This is not the time to cut resources. Cuts just invite an even greater health care crisis," she said.

CSEA retiree Willie Terry said the two groups most in need of help at this point are children and seniors. He quoted the great abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass, who said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

It is time for every New Yorker to speak up and demand tax fairness and the resources New York needs to support its people and its economy as they come out of this pandemic, Terry said.

NYS AFL-CIO has a letter writing campaign underway. You can let your local lawmakers know they can't cut their way out of this fiscal crisis by using this [link](#).

RECOMMIT TODAY!

NEW + EXISTING PEF MEMBERS

SIGN NOW!



PEF to legislators: Invest in your workforce, not in contractors

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

PEF gave state legislators disturbing facts at a joint budget hearing February 10 and asked them to use their common sense and reject state proposals that will cost taxpayers more and provide fewer services and benefits to New Yorkers.

The hearing was one of several held jointly by the state Senate and Assembly to hear public comment on portions of the governor's proposed state budget for fiscal year 2021-22 that begins April 1. This hearing covered state public protection services, plus the Office of Information Technology Systems.

In his written testimony, PEF President Wayne Spence outlined issues of great concern to the union and its members, particularly those involving understaffing, health and safety, the privatization of public services, and the erosion of merit and fitness standards for the hiring and promotion of state employees.

Spence highlighted the crucial role PEF members continue to play in maintaining essential state services through the COVID-19 pandemic even when it puts them in personal danger.

"My members have risked their lives and those of their families to maintain the continuity and quality of services to New York's most vulnerable citizens," Spence said. "They help to rehabilitate those who have violated the law and to counsel and provide safety-net services for at-risk youth. Our members take a great deal of pride in their work because they're professionals and they care, (but they) have received no recognition or remuneration for their selfless and dedicated service. In fact, this proposed budget seeks to privatize many of the critical public services they provide, relocate their jobs to other regions of the state and cut the health insurance benefits that they have earned as faithful and dedicated public servants.

"We need to learn a lesson from this experience. New York needs to develop greater capacity to deliver needed services and to address the current and future disasters in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner.

"That can not be achieved with private contractors performing public services."

Turning to the approximately 5,000 PEF members who work for the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), Spence said the state must allow them to be vaccinated right away, along with inmates.

"Since we continue to hear from the public that staff is the source of COVID-19 in our prisons, why would the state not allow the department to vaccinate its employees?" he asked.

Not only is the state putting its employees at DOCCS in greater danger from the virus, the proposed budget would allow serious disruptions throughout the correctional system.

Spence emphasized that "PEF vehemently opposes" the governor's budget proposal that would allow him to close any number of correctional facilities with only 90-days notice throughout the next two budget years ending March 31, 2023.

"PEF implores the Legislature to keep the current law in place that requires 12 months' notice of a facility closure!" Spence said.

While the proposed budget doesn't call for the outright layoff of state employees, that is actually very deceptive. For example, when DOCCS recently closed three correctional facilities under the current budget, it led to the attrition of 1,247 individuals working in these facilities."

The budget proposal "will adversely impact more than a thousand state workers," Spence wrote, and it presumes the attrition of 800 workers.

"They are clearly forcing workers to either retire or otherwise separate themselves from state employment," Spence testified. "Some employees will be offered a job that may pay less and could be located 80 or 100 miles away. This is a clear disincentive to remain with the state. If the employee accepts



a new position at a different location, it may impact or “bump” an employee with less seniority at that facility.”

This disruption to the state workforce will only undermine employee retention and recruitment and exacerbate the rampant understaffing problems that plague so many state facilities.

Spence said staffing shortages in the DOCCS health care system are “a major concern. The vacancy rates in the titles of nursing, dental and pharmacist have continued to increase over the last year. Vacancy rates for nursing exceed 27 percent, dental 31 percent and pharmacy is now over 10 percent.

“While these numbers are bad,” Spence said. “The reality is far worse. We have facilities managing 24-hour care for both inmates and staff that are at vacancy rates exceeding 50 percent. To name just a few: 58 percent at Cape Vincent, 62 percent at Green Haven, 64 percent at Sing Sing. We have 12 facilities (up from five last year) in total that have greater than 40 percent vacancies and 23 facilities with vacancy rates higher than 30 percent in nursing titles alone.”

“At Elmira, there are currently more agency (traveling) nurses working at the facility than actual full-time state-employed nurses,” Spence said.

“Actual salary-based increases will help stabilize our staffing needs. If the state is serious about attracting and keeping skilled nurses, it is imperative that we begin to look at increasing the base pay for them. Increases are needed for all medical titles within the state workforce.”

In addition to growing reliance on private contractors, chronic understaffing has caused overtime expenses at state agencies to spiral out of control.

“Reliance on overtime to provide adequate staff levels clearly demonstrates the need to reinvest in the state workforce. The taxpayers’ best interest is served by employing the proper number of state employees at state agencies,” Spence said.

These staffing shortages have happened during the pandemic, and at a time of mounting public pressure to release inmates on parole whether they are prepared and otherwise eligible for parole or not, and that has increased violence in the facilities and the danger for facility staff and parole officers as well as for inmates and parolees.

In a January 1 report DOCCS lists 1,047 assaults on staff statewide by inmates in 2020, up from 972 in 2018, and 895 in 2015.

“What the data does not show,” Spence said, “is the number of near misses our members experience in facilities daily. Nor does it account for some actions by inmates that may not be

recorded as assaults, such as threats or the throwing of bodily fluids, which may contain infectious diseases.

As the state has moved some of its older, medically vulnerable and presumably less violent inmates onto early parole to reduce infection danger in the facilities, and has yielded to public and political pressure to reduce disciplinary practices, the changes have heightened the risk of violence within the facilities, PEF testified.

“While smaller, the current population is more violent than ever before,” Spence said. “The administrative changes regarding how inmates are charged with disciplinary violations have empowered and emboldened them to violently stand up against staff. The department continues to provide additional pepper spray as well as enhanced trainings with staff to assist in dealing with these situations.”

Spence also stressed the need to upgrade the staff’s aging personal alarm system at DOCCS. The current system dates to pre-1994. The most recent upgrades, which started in 2009, have not reached 25 percent of facilities.

“The department has continued to put in multimillion-dollar camera systems as well as many other changes. Meanwhile, we are still left with a personal alarm that has an operating system using Windows 9.7 and alarms and repeaters that can only be fixed by using parts found on eBay. I know we are in financially tough times, but I ask you how to quantify the cost of a life lost or a negative life changing event?” Spence said.

The PEF leader cautioned the lawmakers to tread carefully regarding some of the proposed bills that would make further changes at DOCCS.

“Proposed Legislation such as the HALT bill will impact not only the overall safety of staff, but impose an “only the strong survive” environment for the inmates,” Spence said. HALT would interfere with DOCCS’ ability to hold inmates to acceptable standards of behavior. “Continuing to restrict a staff’s choice of sanctions only allows inmates to develop more manipulative skills.”

The better way to help inmates, Spence said, is to invest in more and earlier programs for inmates.

“If inmates received programs such as Aggression Replacement Training or Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment as they enter into incarceration, it would give them the tools to make better choices, both while incarcerated as well as after their release. This would be a better investment than simply allowing inmates to manipulate a law that only allows for 15 days SHU (isolation in a Special Housing Unit) time.”

The pandemic has resulted in one positive change in the correctional system — nearly total elimination of the double

bunking of inmates – and Spence urged the legislators to pass a bill to make that change permanent.

As more inmates are released on parole, the workload is being shifted to state parole officers.

“These officers are already overworked and most have caseloads that are much too high. They cannot possibly handle additional parolees with the current amount of resources provided to them. There needs to be adequate staffing to help parolees transition back to life outside of prison and help them with all aspects of their lives,” Spence testified.

He said PEF opposes the so-called “Less is More” legislation that would “remove all meaningful consequences for bad actors, tie the hands of parole officers and make it much harder for them to help parolees transition successfully back into society. With the number of violent crimes on law enforcement personnel on the rise, the timing of this proposal could not be worse. Eliminating the potential sanctions levied against parolees for violating the terms of their parole hurts the ability of parole officers to facilitate the rehabilitation process, reinforces negative behaviors and potentially puts the community at risk.”

Meanwhile, as more inmates are being released, parole violations are increasing.

The state, Spence said, “needs to stay the course by investing in mental health, job training and other services for our entire inmate population and by hiring additional parole officers to help the growing number of parolees bridge the transition back into society.”

Turning to critical issues raised by budget proposals for meeting the state’s IT needs, Spence said, “Our staff has worked diligently to streamline access to services across the agencies, despite the fact that the state has not adequately filled vacancies caused by attrition and retirement.”

Instead, the state continues to privatize the state’s information technology (IT) services, and would amend the law to allow OITS (Office of Information Technology Services) to unilaterally enter into comprehensive technology service contracts. This proposal would allow the same firm to design and implement IT systems for the state, and will eventually reduce the state workforce and likely cause the outsourcing of these positions to other parts of the globe in the public cloud.”

“There is no need to outsource this phase of IT service delivery to an outside vendor, as proposed. This work can be done in-house with appropriate hiring practices and by investing in training for existing OITS staff.

“These third-party vendors are not always cost effective,”

Spence said. “They often have problems enforcing federal, state and local regulations; maintain questionable data safety and security protocols and protections; and have difficulty integrating cloud-based applications with on-premises applications and data. This proposal will empower the director of OITS to select preferred vendors, circumvent the existing Advisory Council for such decisions and eliminate the preferred vendor bidding process.

Spence strongly urged legislators to reject these budget proposals.

“Instead of increasing the state’s reliance on costly consultants, the most cost-effective option to enhance the state’s IT infrastructure is to invest in the state workforce at OITS,” Spence told them. The Executive Budget proposes an appropriation of \$2 million at OITS to help staff achieve the specific certifications needed most to meet the state’s needs.

“We must ensure that this money is allocated and, more importantly, spent on its intended purpose so that the state can meet its need with qualified, in-house professionals. “

Spence drew the lawmakers’ attention to OITS’ loss of institutional knowledge as many of its employees retire, and the agency’s lack of “any strategic workforce development plan for succession, knowledge transfer, skill development and/or using shadow titles.”

These retirements and loss of institutional knowledge should be opening career advancement opportunities for younger staff, but the state Civil Service system is not reliably working to bring the most capable job candidates forward.

“There are many instances of erosion of the Civil Service merit and fitness system,” Spence said. “While open competitive exams are being offered, there are already hundreds of employees on the current promotional lists who are not being provided any opportunity or consideration for advancement. This has negative effects on employee morale. If a promotional test is being offered, an open competitive test for the same position should not be held.

“Recruitment and promotion is a major issue at the agency,” Spence continued. “Too often, the agency utilizes the selective certification process which actually targets an individual, not a position. We believe that this process should be severely curtailed and in instances where it is used, it should be more transparent.

“The Public Employees Federation believes the state and its taxpayers are much better served over the long-term by investing in OITS and its staff, so that it can continue to deliver excellent and efficient IT services for the state agencies and the residents who utilize state services.

[Read the full written testimony here.](#)



PEF opposes OCFS consolidation, closures at budget hearing

By KATE MOSTACCIO

PEF provided strong testimony against Executive Budget proposals that seek to close or consolidate four Office of Children and Family Services Multi-Services Offices (CMSOs) and to close four facilities for at-risk youth.

"In order to achieve \$1.8 million in savings, the governor proposes the consolidation of four CMSOs," PEF President Wayne Spence stated in written testimony submitted to the Human Services Joint Legislative Budget Hearing panel February 9. "These regional facilities provide community supervision and family engagement and support services for troubled youth in residential placement and after their return to the community."

The proposal calls for closing the Binghamton and Watertown offices and consolidating New York City offices into a single facility in Brooklyn. This move would require increased travel for children in need, which could jeopardize their ability to access services.

"These programs are tailored to address the needs of troubled youth who are often confronted with the most challenging personal and familial situations," Spence said. "Many of these children do not have support to meet their most basic needs, let alone transportation to and from a social service facility 90 minutes away."

The Executive Budget also aims to save money by closing four facilities – the Goshen Secure Center, Red Hook Non-Secure Residential Center, Brentwood Non-Secure Center, and Columbia Secure Center – arguing crime is down and only 50 of the 142 beds are occupied.

"The challenge with this argument is that the data on crime is looking back, not forward," Spence stated. "In fact, law enforcement officials around the country are sounding an alarm about the rise in juvenile offenses stemming mainly from the impact of COVID-19 shutdowns and remote learning."



PEF's testimony outlined the unique and highly specialized care these facilities provide their clients and expressed concern with integrating these youth into other facilities.

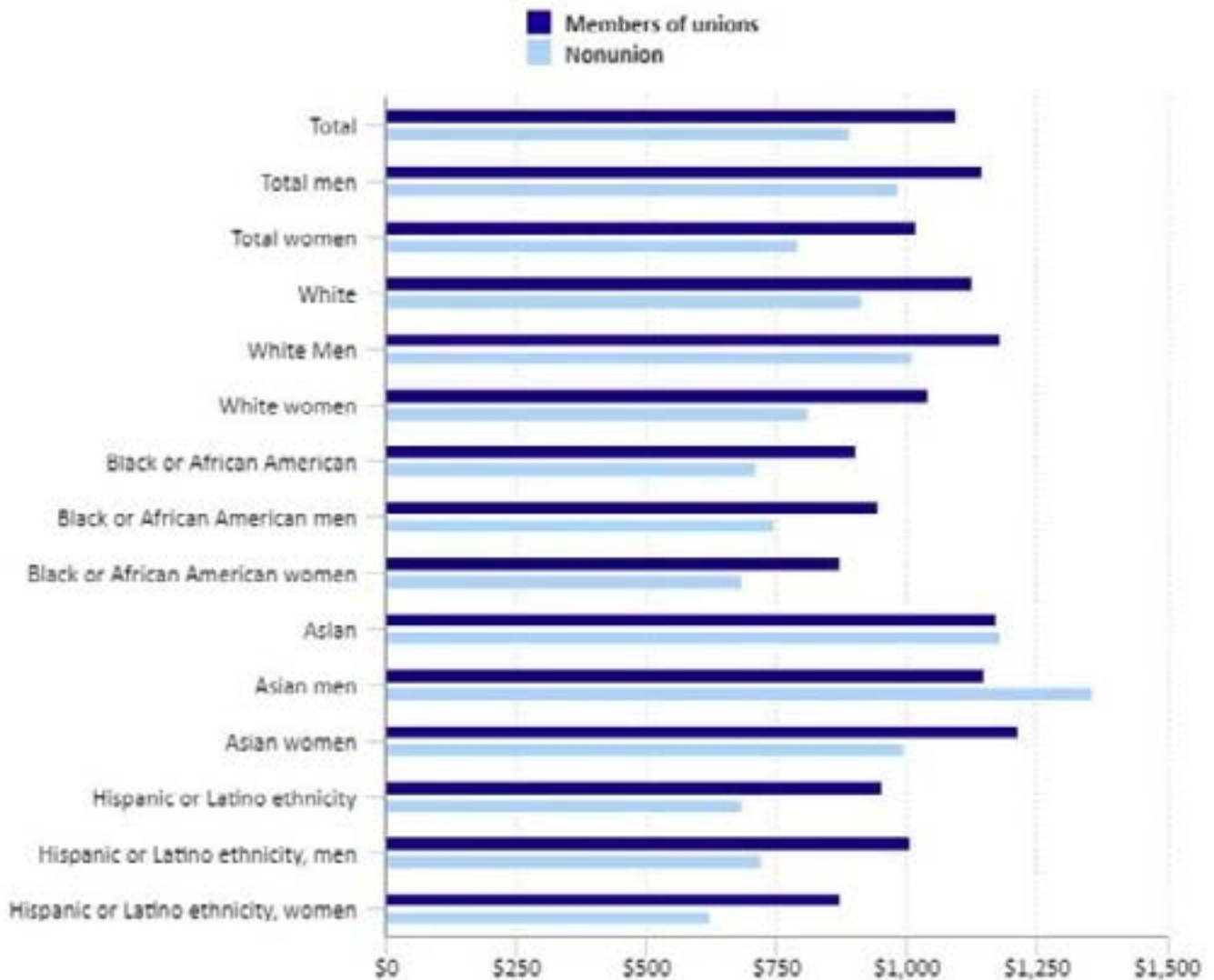
"We urge the Legislature to reject the closure of these youth facilities and to recommit to investing in these and other programs that deliver needed services to help these troubled youth stay out of the criminal justice system and lead productive lives," Spence stated.

To view the full testimony, [click here](#).

While Union Membership May Be Down, ‘Interest In Labor Unions Appears To Be On The Rise.’

Why? Maybe It’s Because Union Workers ‘Still Earn 19% More’ Than Their Non-Union Counterparts

Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, by union affiliation and other characteristics, 2019 annual averages



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Cancer brings value of PEF contract benefits into sharp focus

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Most of us didn't realize or appreciate how free we were until last year, when we suddenly lost that freedom to be safe from the COVID-19 pandemic. The same goes for the blessings of union membership and the contract PEF negotiates for its members. It's easy to ignore them or take them for granted, until you suddenly find that your job or even your life may depend on them.

PEF member Christine Werns had that experience and she took the opportunity recently to post her gratitude to PEF's contract team on Facebook:

"I want to say thank you to the PEF contract teams past and present. Today I went for my last cancer treatment. Thanks to the contract teams' hard work on our health insurance plan, not once did I hear that I couldn't get the treatment or the drugs I needed because my health insurance wouldn't cover it."

"I have the Empire Plan and I only had co-pays to pay ranging from \$20 to \$70. At a time when people are paying thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs for the same treatment I had, I feel extremely lucky that I had contract teams that stood strong to make sure we have the best insurance plan."

"So, once again, a big Thank You to the PEF Contract Teams."

Contacted by phone, Werns said she worked in the private sector for years and never had the benefits of a union contract until 2005 when she took a state job represented by PEF.

"I know what it is to work without a contract and without health insurance or paid sick leave," Werns said. "Another thing that I really appreciate is the ability to rollover unused sick leave and vacation time from one year to the next. I had been saving up my leave in case I ever needed it, and when I did need it I had it. In the private sector, it was use-it-or-lose-it every year.

"We have a lot of benefits in our contracts that people just take for granted. We are so lucky our contract teams fought for those benefits, but we don't appreciate them until we need them."



Werns is a supervising labor services representative at the state Labor Department in Albany and a PEF Division 202 steward. She has formerly served as Division 202 assistant council leader and as a member of the PEF Executive Board.

While she saved enough leave to get her through, Werns said she recognized the tremendous workload the pandemic created for the Labor Department and she has tried to keep working as much as possible through months of cancer treatments.

"It's great to hear from a member that their contract benefits are helping them get through a tough time," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "We wish those times never came to any of us, but PEF and our contract teams do everything we can to create the benefits and safety net for members if and when it happens. Christine's post was very welcome and inspires us to continue these efforts, no matter what situations and obstacles arise. We thank her for expressing her gratitude and telling us that the contract met her need."

Former PEF VP Ken Robertson dies



PEF is grieving the loss of Ken Robertson, 73, a former PEF vice president, Region 10 coordinator, Executive Board member and the first leader of his PEF division during the union's formative years in the 1980s. A US Navy veteran, Robertson died February 23 at a veterans' home in Plainfield, N.J., following a lengthy battle with Parkinson's Disease.

Robertson had been a senior research scientist at what is now the state Office of Addiction Services and Supports. He was very active in PEF for about 14 years, mainly during President Rand Condell's administration (1985-1991). After Robertson left state service in 2003, he went to work for the Transport Workers Union of America, where he was director of applied research until 2010.

"I really liked and enjoyed working with Ken," said Charlene Lojewski, a Region 6 activist who is now retired. "I feel he taught me a lot about PEF and about politics. He will be missed."

Robertson is widely remembered by PEF members and retirees as an energetic, tireless advocate for working families, social justice and good public policy. He was very active in the PEF Political Action Committee, and in the union's early organizing efforts. He was president of the Plainfield Democratic Club and testified before the party's national convention platform committees in 1992 and 1996. His abilities as a problem solver and strategic thinker were much admired by those who knew him best.

He served on the Plainfield Planning Board for 30 years and was honored for his community service in 2013 by the Plainfield Area NAACP.

Sherry Halbrook





Letters to the Editor

Will Pilot Telecommuting Program continue?

To the Editor:

Is there any word on whether the Pilot Telecommuting Program is going to be extended again or not?

The current date of 4/2 is approaching. I asked my agency, and they said they didn't know.

MEGAN NADEAU

Ballston Lake

Editor's note: The ball is in the state's court. PEF wants to see the program extended, but is waiting for the Governor's Office of Employee Relations to make its position clear.



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Speak up now to save our retiree health benefits

I hope you are staying safe, healthy, engaged and energetic as we approach spring. Spring is a time for new growth and warmer weather. As retirees, we can enjoy the change in seasons here in New York and we can hope for a bright COVID-19-free future when we can once again meet in person, gather with friends and family and dine out without fear.

Right now, we all need to do our part in protecting our earned benefits. We need every retiree and future retiree in PEF to step up and contact their legislators about state budget proposals that would negatively affect current and future retirees.

As retired PEF-represented state, we are extremely concerned about budget proposals that once again target fixed-income retirees. The plans to cap and eliminate certain Medicare Part B reimbursements, and to increase our health insurance costs are unfair and bad policy. These proposals, which seem to appear in one form or another every year, must again be rejected by state legislators.

The governor proposes to cap an annually increasing reimbursement of the Medicare Part B standard premium at the current levels and cease reimbursement for the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amounts (IRMAA) for higher income state retirees. He would cap the standard premium reimbursement at \$148.50 per month for retirees and their eligible dependents. Any future increases would be hard to come by, as they would be subject to budget negotiations. In addition, the state would retroactively discontinue the IRMAA Medicare Part B reimbursement back to January 1, 2020. The new IRMAA burden alone will cost affected retirees anywhere from \$713 to \$4,277 annually.

The governor has also proposed a sliding scale for retiree health insurance costs for new employees, which would pose yet another barrier for the recruitment and retention of state workers.

Capping and eliminating these insurance reimbursements and increasing retiree health care costs will greatly affect retirees who dedicated their lives to public service and are now on fixed incomes. Many PEF retirees do not have the financial flexibility to go out and earn extra money in response to budgetary whims. It is patently unfair to pick on these individuals and ask them to fill budget shortfalls long after they have left the workforce. Balancing the state budget should not be a burden we have to bear.

Please take the time to help us as we work to help you by following information below to reach out to your legislators and secure their help to stop these unfair costs increases.

We only have until April 1 to contact our elected officials throughout the state. Due to COVID restrictions, this year will be a very difficult time to physically perform legislative visits. So, it is even more imperative that we each send a letter, email, or call our state senator and assembly member; and let them know why it is so important to defeat these proposals.

Call the state Assembly at 518-455-4100 and ask for your state Assembly member, or follow this link to find your Assembly member: <https://nyassembly.gov/mem>.

Call the state Senate at 518-455-2800 and ask for your state senator or use this link to find your senator: <https://www.nysenate.gov/senators-committees>

To send a pre-written letter to your legislators online, use the link below to login and select START WRITING. Please add your name and address to the bottom of the letter. <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/retirement-health-care-costs-for-state-retirees-3>

Talking points or for letter writing:

As a constituent and a retired state employee represented by the Public Employees Federation (PEF), I am extremely concerned about the proposals in Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget that once again target our fixed-income retirees. The governor's plan to cap and eliminate certain Medicare Part B reimbursements and increase health insurance costs is unfair and bad policy. These proposals, which seem to appear in one form or another every year, must be rejected.

Or

As my elected representative, I kindly ask that you work with the leadership in your house to remove Parts CC, DD and EE of the Public Protection and General Government Article VII Budget Bill (A.3005/S.2505) to reject these bad proposals that would increase health care costs for state retirees. Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this very important issue.



Saluting members on their retirements

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

PEF's gratitude and best wishes go out to its members who are retiring and moving on to the next chapter of their lives.

The union hopes they will join PEF Retirees and remain active and valued participants in the PEF family.

This month, we salute:

- **Zachary Cogon**, PEF Division 169, state Department of Environmental Conservation;
- **Dr. Jacob Daniel Kanofsky**, PEF Division 213, Bronx Psychiatric Center;
- **Kristine Kilmartin**, PEF Division 190, state Department of Taxation and Finance;
- **Edward Lai**, PEF Division 341, state Department of Taxation and Finance;
- **Dayna Lamb**, PEF Division 236, state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision;
- **James Mahoney**, PEF Division 179, state Office of General Services;
- **John O'Hara**, PEF Division 179, state Office of General Services;
- **John Pacini**, PEF Division 190, state Department of Taxation and Finance;
- **Jannettia Pearce**, PEF Division 339, state Department of Motor Vehicles; and
- **Michael Rebalko**, PEF Division 339, state Department of Motor Vehicles.

Are you or PEF members you know retiring? Please send information for this column to thecommunicator@pef.org.



Ailing members need your leave donations

The following PEF members have reported a need for leave donations due to the need for medical treatment or recuperation from illness or injury.

Donations are made from annual leave and donors must retain at least 10 days of annual leave after donating. To donate leave, obtain a leave-donation form from your personnel or human resources office and submit it to that office. You may donate leave to employees at both the agency where you work and to those working at other state agencies.

To help facilitate donations, we list an HR contact number for each person needing donations on the list below.

- **Heather Crunden** is a nurse practitioner at SUNY Binghamton in Binghamton. Call 518-457-4272;
- **Laura Lama** is a senior photographer at the state School for the Blind in Batavia. Call 585 343-5384;
- **Heather Crunden** is a nurse practitioner at SUNY Binghamton in Binghamton. Call 518-457-4272;
- **Rebecca Bezon Sando** is a nurse 2 at Orleans Correctional Facility in Albion. Call 585-589-6820;
- **Nora Fulton** is a teaching and research center nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse. Call 315-464-4943;

The rules for making and receiving leave donations (such as leave recipients may not have had any disciplinary actions or unsatisfactory performance evaluations within their last three years of state employment) are set forth on pages 181 and 182 of the 2016-19 PS&T Contract. If you, or a PEF member you know, need leave donations because of a medical issue, you may contact The Communicator to request publication of that need. Send requests to thecomunicator@pef.org, or call 800-342-4306, ext. 271. Be sure to provide your contact information.





February 27, 2021
New York State Fire Protection Specialists PEF Div 179

Its just another day at the Beach (Jones Beach)for Fire Protection Specialist Christina Conley Mastrella who is one of the many FPS assigned to covid sites throughout the State.



February 27, 2021
Michele Grier Silsby, Joe McCann & Stephanie McLean-Beathley with Frankie Scinta of The Scintas Variety Club Telethon!



February 25, 2021
PEF Division 193 Leader Vincent Carioscia and members of PEF and CSEA joined with Senator Mike Martucci and James Skoufis, and Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus in a call for the preservation of hundreds of local jobs at the Goshen Secure Center today! We urge the State Legislature to reject the proposed closure to save our jobs and services!!



February 22, 2021
PEF members with ITS in NYC got a short break from their seven-days-a-week work supporting the vaccination effort on Saturday when a NY PopsUp event was held at the Javits Center.

