

# PEF RALLIES FOR BETTER PAROLE REFORM

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# The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



## Less was Never More with Parole Reform

October 18, 2021 — The October issue of The Communicator arrives less than a week before about 500 delegates gather in Niagara Falls for PEF's 43rd Annual Convention. We will publish again in November to update all members about the decisions that are made at Convention 2021.

In this issue, I'd just like to point out a couple stories, starting with the cover image – [a rally PEF Division 236 organized outside Rikers Island on October 7](#). More than 100 parole officers from around the state attended to make their voices heard about one of the worst laws that came out of the last New York State legislative session – so-called “Less is More” parole reform. PEF lobbied hard against its passage and now that it is law we won't stop pointing out its flaws and pushing for amendments to mitigate its harmful effects. I'd like to thank Council Leader Gina Lopez and Assistant Council Leader Gabriella Franklyn for their advocacy. The Rikers rally is not the last time we'll be speaking out as a union on this issue. Another rally is being organized in Western New York later this year and we will share details as soon as it is planned.

The issue impacting most PEF members, of course, is the various vaccine and testing mandates imposed by New York State on its workforce. A second mandate went into effect last week and affects the majority of members. You'll find [a summary of a Telephone Town Hall](#) we held about that mandate in this issue, and I encourage all impacted members to know their rights when it comes to these mandates. Members subject to the Sept. 27 healthcare worker mandates should see [this Fact Sheet](#). And members subject to the Oct. 12 mandate should see [this Fact Sheet](#).

Another new story worth pointing out in this issue – [PEF VP Randi DiAntonio's presentation at a SEIU webinar about “New York State Fund Our Future.”](#) With the launch of the new [PEF.org](#), the Fund Our Future website is also up and running and I encourage you to check it out and see how you can get involved in the campaign. We'll be using those three words to brand many of our efforts in the year ahead – from mobilization to legislative lobbying to political activism. The campaign will grow in strength as the number of committed members grows and I look forward to working with you to spotlight the critical services PEF members perform every day to keep New York State running.

Thank you for all that you do and please continue to stay safe.

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Wayne Spence  
PEF President





# Parole officers, crime victim advocates rally against ‘Less is More’ parole reform

By KATE MOSTACCIO

New York State parole officers rallied outside Rikers Island on Oct. 7, 2021, to denounce the recently signed “Less is More” parole reform law and call out its serious repercussions for community safety, parole supervision and crime victims.

“Bottom line – the ‘Less’ in this law is public safety; the ‘More’ is crime,” said Gina Lopez, a parole officer and council leader of PEF Division 236, which includes about 800 parole officers across New York state. “As parole officers, we want to do our jobs to the best of our ability and this misguided law makes that difficult.”

“Less Is More” unilaterally prohibits parole officers from using their experience, training and knowledge to protect communities from parolees who are willfully and despite repeated warnings continuing down a path toward re-violating the law. It irreparably harms the rehabilitation

process for many parolees and eliminates the authority of parole officers to counsel or issue violations to parolees for violations like illegal drug use, alcohol use, skipping curfew and failing to report.

“We believe in reform, but this law requires that we turn our eyes away from those who are still serving their court-imposed sentences, but who continue to demonstrate the same bad behaviors and make the same bad choices that negatively impact their communities and which got them in trouble in the first place,” said PEF President Wayne Spence, a parole officer for almost three decades.

Spence and Lopez, joined by fellow parole officer Gabriela Franklyn, shared real-life violations they have seen on the job and pointed to news articles where parolees on the streets committed new crimes.

## Crime victim, advocate speaks out

Jennifer Harrison's life changed forever on January 15, 2005, when a parolee participated in the murder of her boyfriend and his friend.

The man escaped conviction when his brother plead guilty to the homicides.

"He was never violated for being out of state, for being in a bar, or for being involved in an altercation resulting in two homicides. All of which are clear violations," said Harrison, the founder of [Victims Rights NY](#). "So many of the families I work with watched as 'their murderers' were paroled recently. Their only safety nets were geographical limitations and knowing that if the killer didn't do the right thing, he/she would go back to prison. This law makes it virtually impossible to reincarcerate parolees for breaking the rules, even though they were released from prison on the premise of being rehabilitated.

"They have already been to hell and back, are distraught and now live in fear," she said. "They constantly wonder why their government keeps doing this to them while helping those who murdered their children and loved ones."

PEF fought Less is More for more than four years, meeting with legislators and lobbying against the bill in Albany. Those demands have not changed since the bill was signed into law by Gov. Kathy Hochul on Sept. 17. PEF believes meaningful parole reform must impact all aspects of reintegrating parolees into their communities – providing adequate funding for low-cost education, technical training, mental health and wellness, addiction services and housing — while keeping those communities safe and preventing additional crimes. In addition, PEF would like the State to consider amending its sentencing guidelines, which have not changed since 1995. To start, lawmakers should review the legislative risk assessment process that too often saddles parole officers with high caseloads.

"Since the proposal of this legislation, we as parole officers have continuously requested to have a seat at the table to provide input on effective parole reform within New York, but it has fallen on deaf ears," Lopez said.

## Support in Albany

Some state legislators stood behind the parole officers.

"Earlier this year, 90 members of the State Legislature voted 'no' on Less is More because we knew it was a mistake," said State Sen. Diane J. Savino, D, IP-23rd Senate District. "We knew that the narrative being put forward did not reflect the truth of what is happening with parole officers or parolees. Understaffed and under-resourced, our parole officers are not able to adequately support those who are released early to succeed. This bill has been conflated with the disastrous management of Rikers Island and will do nothing to improve conditions for them or those who monitor parolees or those who need their help to regain productive lives."

"Voting against a bill can be difficult but necessary after careful review of its overall purpose and consequences," said Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. "'Less is More' is an example of legislation that, while well-intended, does not adequately address concerns for the safety of both residents and parole officers, fairness to victims, or repercussions of the parolee's overall rehabilitation. Possibly contributing to a more effective solution would be to increase the number of Parole Officers and services to help them assist parolees with housing, mental health and addiction services, and job training," Addabbo added.

"I stand with the hardworking parole officers who need all available tools at their disposal to do their very difficult jobs," said State Sen. Todd Kaminsky, D-9th Senate District. "They need our support now more than ever."







# PEF was a strong foe of 'Less is More' legislation

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Recognizing its devastating impact on parole officers and their ability to do their job, as well as the risk to public safety, PEF worked hard behind the scenes to oppose the "Less is More" parole reform bill.

Since the bill's introduction, PEF engaged in news media campaigns, submitted comments to major media outlets, covered the issue in union publications, sent emails to members urging them to contact their legislators, and lobbied hard in Albany.

While DC 37 locals supported this bill, PEF sounded the alarm and supported the views of its parole members throughout the process.

"PEF was a powerful foe fighting against Less Is More," said President Wayne Spence. "We knew that proponents of this legislation simplified community supervision down to meet their needs and we carried the message of what parole and

community supervision is really all about and how it works. On behalf of our members, we were in the ears of many key legislators trying to educate them on what was wrong with Less is More.

"We hope our members will help us in our continuing efforts to shine light on this damaging bill," Spence said. "We ask that you all take a few minutes and reach out to your representatives. Tell them how this bill is a danger to public safety. Let's use our collective voice and keep pushing back."

[Click here](#) for a list of New York State lawmakers who voted in favor of "Less is More."

The next page is a timeline of PEF's advocacy on behalf of parole officers, in the news, in the Capitol and through union activities.

## Coverage in the News

Jan. 29, 2020: *Queens Daily Eagle*: [Formerly Incarcerated New Yorkers Press for Parole Reform](#)  
Oct. 29, 2020: *Spectrum News* 'Capital Tonight' with Susan Arbetter: [PEF President Says 'No' to Parole Reform](#)  
Oct. 30, 2020: *Press Republican* (Clinton, Essex, Franklin Counties): [Half Dozen Upstate Parole Officers Test Positive for Virus](#)  
Jan. 28, 2021: *New York State of Politics*: ['Less is More' Act Eliminates Incarceration for Parole Violations](#)  
May 6, 2021: *New York State of Politics*: ['Capital Tonight' interview with President Spence, including discussion of parole reform](#)  
June 3, 2021: *Times Herald-Record*: ['Giving People a Chance,' Advocates Push for Parole Reform, but Time is Ticking](#)  
June 8, 2021: *The City*: [Parole Reform Set to Pass in Albany After Riker's Deaths](#)

## Legislative Advocacy

February 27, 2019: Met with Senator Benjamin  
March 8, 2019: Drafted sign-on letter for other groups to join in opposition  
March 9, 2019: Met with Senator Myrie  
March 12, 2019: Met with Assemblymember Crespo  
March 20, 2019: Met with Assemblymember Weprin  
April 27, 2019: Comparison of "A" and "B" print drafted  
April 30, 2019: Met with Assemblymember Walter Mosley (the bill's primary Assembly sponsor) in Albany (President Spence attended)  
May 6, 2019: Met with Speaker Carl Heastie in Albany (President Spence attended)  
May 14, 2019: DOCCS Lobby Day  
May 14, 2019: Met with Senator Brian Benjamin & Walter Mosley in Albany (Senate and Assembly Primary Sponsors) (President Spence attended)  
May 17, 2019: Met with Assemblymember Weprin's staff  
May 24, 2019: Met with Senate staff  
May 28, 2019: Met in Albany for bill discussion with parole leaders and mark up meeting (President Spence attended)  
May 31, 2019: Marked up bill sent to MoA Mosley from May 28 meeting  
June 3, 2019: Parole leaders receive bill mark up and script to call MoA Weprin's office  
June 4, 2019: Oppose memo on A.5493-A/S.1343-B issued  
June 4, 2019: Amorosi email to Mike Neidl asking AFL-CIO to issues Less is More oppose memo  
June 18, 2019: Update email to PEF parole leaders  
June: Met with Senate Leader Stewart-Cousins in Albany  
June: Assemblymember Weprin thanked for not moving bill and he offers to let Pres. Spence speak to the Committee before the bill is considered  
July 19, 2019: Met with Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez in NYC (President Spence attended)  
August 23, 2019: Amorosi email to Weprin chief of staff about bill and President Spence speaking to Committee in 2020  
November 1, 2019: Met with large group of parole members and Brian Benjamin in NYC (President Spence attended)  
November 14, 2019: State Senator Luis Sepulveda (Chair of Senate Corrections Committee) hosts roundtable discussion for criminal justice reform stakeholders in NYC. PEF represented by Lindsay Bonanza (DOCCS) and Dayna Lamb (Parole) (President Spence attended)  
November 19, 2019: PEF on the Move call to action email to parole officers  
December 3, 2019: Talking points emailed to VP DiAntonio and President Spence by Amorosi  
December 5, 2019: Parole leaders met in NYC for strategy session for Bar Association meeting and mark up of technical violations bill language (President Spence attended)  
December 11, 2019: Presentation to NYS Bar Association Parole Reform Taskforce in NYC (by invitation) (President Spence attended)  
December 2020: Worked with Public Employee Conference to include opposition to "Less is More" as a part of their legislative program. PEC includes most of the state's uniformed officers.  
January 10, 2020: Parole member meeting in NYC (President Spence attended)  
February 15, 2020: Albany Caucus Weekend Workshop. Council Leader Gina Lopez panelist on reentry resources workshop  
February 20, 2020: Met with parole leaders and Sen. Luis Sepulveda in NYC on parole reform and reentry resources (President Spence attended)  
February 8, 2021: Bill on Senate Crime Victims, Crime and Correction committee agenda and PEF Memo in Opposition #1 issued to full legislature – Bill Reported to Finance  
February 10, 2021: SWPAC given PEF Oppose memo #1 and asked to contact regional legislators  
February 10, 2021: PEF testifies before the Public Protection Joint Legislative Hearing against "Less is More"  
February – June 2021: Multiple meetings with Sen. Salazar (Chair, Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections) and Asm. Weprin (Chair, Codes), as well as central staff on "Less is More" at each we request the opportunity to address the committee on our concerns over Less is More.  
March 19, 2021: Meeting with parole leaders and new Senate Corrections Committee Chair Sen. Julia Salazar (President Spence attended)  
April 21, 2021: Covered at SWPAC meeting and discussed as TOP PRIORITY  
April 22, 2021: PEF Oppose Memo #2 Sent to Full Legislature  
April 28, 2021: Email blast to Division 236 asking for action on "Less is More"  
May 11, 2021: Bill on Senate Finance Agenda – Bill held at sponsor's request pending amendments  
May 11 – June 7, 2021: Multiple requests for inclusion in negotiations with senior Senate staff and Senator Benjamin  
May 13, 2021: SWPAC Given Oppose Memo along with other End of Session priorities  
May 28, 2021: PEF Memo in Opposition # 2 issued to full legislature  
May 28, 2021: PEF Memo #2 sent to SWPAC along with link to court decision for SWPAC to contact legislators  
June 1, 2021: Public Employee Conference Issues Memo in Opposition at PEFs request  
June 2021: President Spence meets with Assembly member Forrest – the lead sponsor  
June 4, 2021: PEF on the Move – email blast to members highlighting that Public Employee Conference joins PEF in Opposition to "Less is More"  
June 7, 2021: Bill is amended – Amendments posted at 11:59 p.m. Bill placed on Rules Committee and Assembly Codes Committee Agendas for scheduled passage on Thurs., June 10, 2021  
June 8, 2021: PEF Memo in Opposition #3 is sent to Full Legislature  
June 8, 2021: PEF Memo in Opposition #3 is sent to Division 236 in email blast asking for action  
June 8, 2021: PEF Memo in opposition #3 sent to SWPAC and asked to contact legislators  
June 8 – 10, 2021: PEF Legislative and Political Departments contact senate and assembly majority members regarding the problems with the amended bill  
June 10, 2021: Bill passes both houses  
June 23, 2021: President Spence sent a letter to Gov. Cuomo detailing how 'Less Is More' poses a public safety risk, undercuts the rehabilitation process, and is yet another unfunded mandate

## Parole Newsletter

December 2020: Digital newsletter to all parole titles

## PEF Communicator and PEF.org

December 2020: Parole officers always stuck between rocks and hard places (page 20)  
April 2, 2021: Parolee assault of elderly woman highlights critical role of services, parole system  
May 28, 2021: PEF Oppose Less Is More Parole Reform

# PEF holds tele-town hall on vaccine or test mandate

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

PEF held a telephone-town-hall meeting October 14 to update members on the many issues resulting from those New York state's vaccine or test mandate with several of the union's top staff members answering questions they have received. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

The most important thing for everyone to remember, PEF President Wayne Spence said, is that the greatest danger is from the potentially divisive effect the issue can have.

"I see members being pitted against each other," Spence said, referring to individual members' opinions about whether everyone should be required to receive a COVID-19 vaccination, or not. Letting different opinions on this issue turn members against each other is not acceptable and will weaken the union's ultimate ability to represent every member and protect their legal and contractual rights. "We have more in common than in division over this issue," he said.

The union sent a survey that day, to every member to garner their opinions on vaccinations and testing for the virus.

"Your voice matters. We need to weigh the opinions and insights of every member, so please respond quickly," Spence said. Ultimately, PEF cannot dictate state policy on vaccinations and testing, but it has a duty under the PS&T contract and the PEF Constitution to represent all of its members in negotiating how the state's actions may affect them.

PEF Director of Contract Administration Debra Greenberg recommended that members who are required to be tested weekly for COVID-19 consider ordering kits for at-home testing. They can take a test with them to work to use it. That will eliminate the need to leave work and go somewhere else to be tested. The member following this method should register and order the kit, take it to work, use it and mail in their swab or saliva sample to the testing company. When they receive the results, they should upload them to the state's portal.

If you take the test at home, you will not be paid for the time you spend on testing and mailing the sample. However, Greenberg said you should report the time on your timesheet. "If it is rejected, comply, save the report and rejection and send it to your PEF field representative," she said.



Meanwhile, Greenberg said she is talking to the Governor's Office of Employee Relations about letting employees use their agency mailrooms to send in their test samples. "Make a good faith effort to comply with the testing requirement. Do everything as soon as possible to comply," Greenberg advised.

PEF Director of Health and Safety Geraldine Stella told members to check the COVID-19 information that is posted and frequently updated at [PEF.org/covid-19](https://www.pef.org/covid-19).

Stella said that while every New York county is at either high risk or extremely high risk for infection based on their current numbers of new infections, hospitalizations and deaths, members should be heartened to know that these numbers are going down and the vaccines are working well against the highly contagious Delta variant. She added that the drug company Merck has developed an anti-viral drug to treat COVID-19 infections and has applied to the federal Food and Drug Administration for its approval.

Stella further reported that testing is becoming more sensitive and accurate, as well as less invasive. Members have asked if nasal swabs sterilized with ethylene oxide are dangerous, Stella said, and the answer is no. Swabs contain only a minimal trace of the chemical if any at all.

The best way to protect employees and members of the public is to take a layered approach that includes measures such as cleaning, air filtration and high fresh-air exchange



rates, masking, hand washing, social distancing, and testing even the people who have been vaccinated.

The group at highest risk of becoming infected and transmitting the virus to others are those who have not been vaccinated against it, Stella said. In fact, 95 percent of new infections are in unvaccinated people, and they are 29 times more likely to transmit it to others.

Even if you have had COVID, you can still benefit greatly from being vaccinated, Stella said. Researchers have not yet been able to nail down how long any immunity you have from surviving an earlier infection will last. "Vaccines provide better protection," Stella said.

If you have had COVID in the past and are vaccinated now, you might get a strong immune response to the vaccination. "You might feel worse, but you will get stronger protection," she said.

Members who have doubts about the advisability of being vaccinated should talk to their personal medical doctor about their concerns, Stella said.

PEF General Counsel Edward Greene reviewed the various statutes that relate to issues associated with the vaccine and testing mandates and any injury that might result. Challenges to such mandates recently were dismissed as frivolous by a judge. The US Supreme Court has denied requests for it to review such decisions.

If you sincerely believe that COVID vaccination is against your religious beliefs, you should apply immediately for a religious exemption to the mandate, Greene said. "The employer is required to consider that request for exemption to vaccination, but not for exemption to testing," he said.

PEF members who are professional employees may find their license to practice challenged if they refuse to comply with the vaccination mandate. Greene said PEF will provide legal representation for members who face possible revocation of their license, but it must be related to their work duties.

Spence said he disagrees with members who have told him they believe the state needs nurses too badly to terminate them for refusing to be vaccinated.

"We have about 50 nurses who have received termination notices," Spence said.

PEF Director of Field Services Katie Vorwald said she believes the state will enforce the vaccination mandate until all of the employees who can be vaccinated are.

If you have a timing problem in complying with testing or vaccination, you should notify management of that problem, Vorwald said, and then notify your PEF steward or field representative.

"If you test positive for COVID, report it to your county health department," Vorwald said. "You have quarantine (leave) benefits.

"We strongly encourage the state to do its own robust contact tracing, but GOER is leaving it up to the agencies." PEF Director of Organizing Dan Carpenter reminded members that anti-union groups have no scruples about exploiting any division over this issue within a union.

"Your union didn't mandate vaccinations and testing, the state did it against our objections," Carpenter said. "We fight for a healthy, safe workplace, and common sense."

Remember, Spence added, "We are stronger when we stand together."

# VP DiAntonio serves as panelist, discusses threats to public services and PEF's Fund Our Future campaign

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Labor leaders from across the country came together September 30 for a webinar on threats to the public service sector, discussing the devastating impact of privatization on the services public employees provide.

PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio served as a panelist and shared the situation in New York.

"We are the backbone of New York state government," DiAntonio said. "We have been under constant threat for well over the last decade. It has been devastating. We've suffered through years of budget mismanagement; years of not backfilling positions. We have a former governor who put an arbitrary 2 percent cap on state agencies.

"New York has privatized public jobs and services at an alarming rate," she said. "At the same time, we have an aging workforce and many retirements, all compromising our ability to deliver critical services that our communities rely on."

DiAntonio called out the state's design-build flaws as an example.

"We have people designing and building the bridges and roads we drive on with our children," she said. "They are also the ones inspecting the work."

For decades, we have been underfunded and under resourced. This has led to increased closures and consolidations of public facilities, reliance on private health care and developmentally disabled service providers, 5,000 state job vacancies, stagnant wages, overworked and stressed out employees – all then exacerbated by COVID – amounting to a state in crisis.

But, the struggles also afford a chance for change.

"We found ourselves right in the spotlight as far as the need for quality public services," DiAntonio said. "We were the first ones hitting the frontlines on COVID in New Rochelle. There were 19 million hours of overtime in 2020 alone. We didn't have the bodies we needed so we had to rely on what we did have. Average citizens became frustrated when they couldn't access the services they needed."



With a renewed interest in public services and the struggles of public servants, DiAntonio said it is time to change the narrative.

"We realized we have been talking about austerity and privatization for many, many years, but the average citizen couldn't relate to that lingo, it was insider baseball," she said.

"We realized we needed to

change our approach.

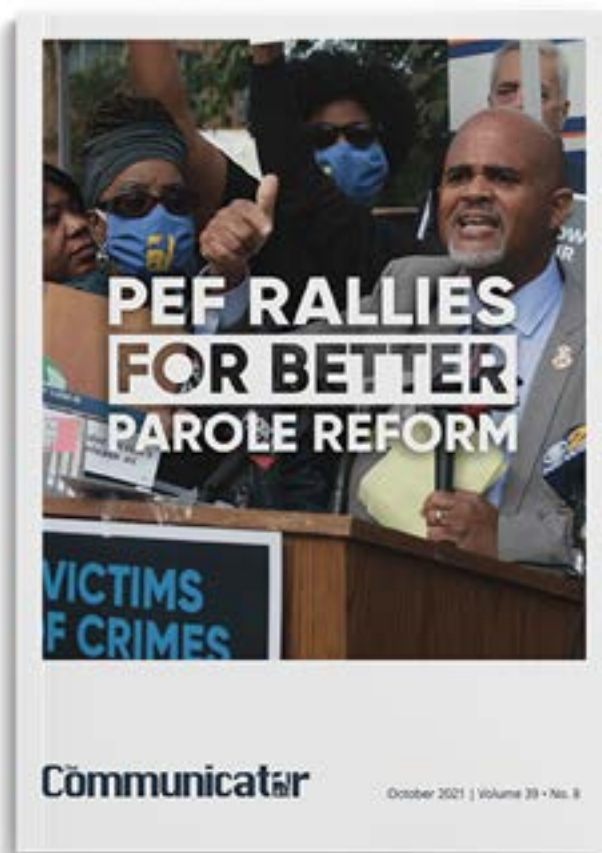
"We at PEF decided we have to start fighting differently," she said. "We started asking the questions, what do public services mean to citizens? Why should they care? What does a society that puts people first look like? How do we build alliances to grow public services."

Out of those questions and the need to fight privatization and increase support of the public workforce grew a new campaign – Fund Our Future for a Thriving New York. Focusing on public health, public safety, public oversight, expanding the civil service workforce and expanding the safety net, Fund Our Future will look to PEF members to be the face of the campaign.

"We know that our members are our strongest weapon," DiAntonio said. "We know that most New Yorkers don't really know what we do for them. We're not out there on TV talking about it unless there is a crisis. People used to look down on civil servants, but they now know we do the work of heroes. Members are the best ones to relay the message to other citizens."

PEF will be recording video testimonials with delegates at the October convention about the vital work they do for New York. If you're not a delegate and would like to be involved in Fund Our Future, please visit the campaign website at [www.pef.org/FundOurFuture](http://www.pef.org/FundOurFuture) to complete a survey and tell PEF what you're willing to do.





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# Roswell park nurse, breast cancer survivor shares tips, resources for patients during Breast Cancer Awareness Month

By KATE MOSTACCIO

A cancer diagnosis changes a person's life in an instant. "In the United States in 2021, there will be an estimated 281,550 new cases of invasive breast cancer diagnosed in women; 2,650 cases diagnosed in men; and an additional 49,290 cases of ductal carcinoma in situ diagnosed in women," according to the [American Cancer Society](https://www.cancer.org). "An estimated 44,130 breast cancer deaths (43,600 women, 530 men) will occur in 2021."

Having the right team of experts is vital, says PEF member Anne Courtney, a breast cancer survivor who is both an employee and a patient at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, working as a registered nurse in the Head & Neck and Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery Department.

"You need to get the right expert care to manage your treatment," Courtney said. "Find a place where you have experts who are up-to-date on the most recent treatments. Find a compassionate team that you trust. Advocate for yourself and stay informed about your care. There are no stupid questions."

Courtney said the mental health toll on patients is often staggering – so don't ignore it.

"Seeking mental health care is really important," she said. "It affects you in a lot of ways. It's very stressful treatment, the physical effects, the emotional effects. You are dealing with

thoughts about survival. You may have body image issues. It's important to seek treatment if you find yourself having a hard time.

"You also need to have the support of your family and friends," Courtney said. "A lot of people don't want to bother anybody. It's a time to accept any help that is offered."

## Taking steps toward prevention

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, Courtney stresses the importance of vigilance for women and men, especially those with a family history of breast cancer or other risk factors.

"Pay attention to your body," she said. "Make sure you go for the required tests, such as mammograms. Stay on top of it and be proactive."

The American Cancer Society – [www.cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) — is a good place to find guidelines for testing, information about the tests, signs and symptoms to look for, and much more.

"Finding breast cancer early and getting state-of-the-art cancer treatment are the most important strategies to prevent deaths from breast cancer," the American Cancer Society states. "Breast cancer that's found early, when it's small and has not spread, is easier to treat successfully. Getting regular



screening tests is the most reliable way to find breast cancer early.”



### Resources and the Roswell Park advantage

With 29 years experience as a nurse at Roswell Park, Courtney loves her job and the work being done at Roswell Park. Teams of specialists, many of whom are PEF members, can make a huge difference in the lives of patients, bringing innovative treatments, including clinical trials, to patients facing some of the worst days of their lives.

Support systems and resources are available to help guide new patients through the process of treatment.

The Resource Center for Patients and Families is a wealth of supportive services, such as A Wig, Scarf and Hat Boutique, where any cancer patient can select a free wig or other head covering once a year and have it fitted; The Cancer Coach Program, which matches newly diagnosed patients with trained volunteer coaches, who provide support, encouragement and information; and Look Good ... Feel Better, a free once-a-month program to help lift the spirit.

Going through her own journey, Courtney found the [Look Good ... Feel Better program](#) particularly valuable. The program helps patients and survivors deal with appearance-related side effects of their cancer treatment, and offers skin, hair and nail care tips, make-up techniques and demonstrations for wig, scarf, hat and turban styling.

“That was great,” she said. “I was able to get a wig and it helped me restore my confidence.”

Courtney praised the care she, and others, receive at Roswell Park.

“It has been a really great place to work and I’m proud of the care that we give,” she said. “I recommend it to family and friends who have been diagnosed with cancer.”

# RECOMMIT TODAY!

**NEW + EXISTING PEF MEMBERS**

**SIGN NOW!**

# New Region 4 coordinator ready to do more, learn more

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Gina Corona is the new PEF Region 4 coordinator. It's a new challenge for her, but it's a logical progression after years of activism in the union.

A licensed master social worker 2 with the state Office of Mental Health in Syracuse, she has two decades of state service and has gradually taken on more and more leadership responsibilities in PEF.

Cayuga, Cortland, Jefferson, Onondaga, Oswego, and Seneca Counties comprise Region 4, and they stretch along the eastern shore of Lake Ontario. Syracuse is the biggest city and that's where the PEF regional office is located. Corona said she feels her years of service as council leader of PEF Division 301 at Hutchings Psychiatric Center, and as an Executive Board member representing members at seven state facilities has been good preparation for this new challenge.

"We have a strong steward council in Division 301 and I'm eager to pass the council leader duties on to one of our strong council members," Corona said. "We will be holding a division election soon."

Her father was a Teamster and Corona said she found herself in a union at age 16 when she took a job of cashier while in high school.

"I've always said, union leaders aren't born, they are made." And her work for the state quickly taught her why you need a union to stand by you. "Management didn't want to approve time off. I worked every day and had the time to use, but they would not approve it." She was seeking time to address medical and family needs. When my son was born, he was in the neonatal intensive care unit at the hospital for a month. I got to know my PEF field representative Bob Tompkins and he taught me about my rights under the contract. At one point, I applied for leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and my employer denied it. Bob helped me file my first grievance and I won!"



Corona said that grievance win gave her the confidence to become a PEF steward, and then she saw that many of her fellow members needed help and understaffing was nearly always at the root of their on-the-job difficulties. As she worked to help them, Corona said she learned how important it is to know something about your contract and

how it protects you. She said that she also began to develop a network of helpful union contacts throughout Region 4 and beyond. Serving as a convention delegate and on the statewide labor-management committee at her agency has also helped her see how issues can be identified and addressed.

Corona said she found that resolving individual issues is important for both the employee and for the public they serve. "When the employee gets what they need, they can do a better job," she said.

Now she is ready, Corona said, to put everything she has learned to work for Region 4 members and to continue learning and building skills with every experience.



# Abraham takes on leadership role in Region 3

By SHERRY HALBROOK

Leisa Abraham, a psychologist 2 at Finger Lakes Developmental Disabilities Services Office in the Newark area, is PEF's new Region 3 coordinator.

Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans and Wayne Counties make up Region 3, which extends along Lake Ontario's southwestern shore, from the Rochester area most of the way toward Buffalo.

Prior to her election as Region 3 coordinator this year, Abraham served in various PEF positions across two PEF division steward councils at Finger Lakes Developmental Disabilities Services Office, as a steward, treasurer and council leader over a period of 20 years. Beginning in 2018, she served on the PEF Executive Board and chaired the PEF Region 3 Political Action Committee. She also has served on the PEF Justice Center Committee, PEF Convention Credentials Committee and a PEF Grievance Appeal Panel.

It's said that timing is everything, and stepping into this new leadership role just now feels like stepping into a whirlwind.

"Everything is moving fast!" Abraham said.

She is taking on this job during a deadly pandemic when nothing is routine and members are beset by changes, potentially deadly risks and unexpected demands on their jobs. The union is caught up statewide in trying to represent and protect the job security and health and safety of members who may have very different ideas about what that should mean.

Masks, COVID-19 vaccinations and telecommuting are big issues piling on to older, entrenched problems such as chronic short staffing, mandated overtime and low pay that plague nearly every state agency and worksite. Add to that a sudden switch in state governors and now no one feels the ground is steady beneath their feet.



"Things keep changing. Who knew last year that getting people vaccinated would take such an effort? People have rights, and some of them don't want to be vaccinated. We have some group homes for our clients that have very low vaccination rates.

"Now, the state wants everyone (who wasn't deemed essential) to

come back to working in their offices, but from a health and safety standpoint, the standards are based on just 50 percent occupancy," Abraham said.

Meetings, rallies, protests and events that typically bring members together are all the more challenging to pull off during the pandemic and Abraham said that she wants to build on some events that have been popular with members of Division 246. For the moment, Abraham is trying to organize a Region 3 event this fall for members at Long Acre Farms, which will give them a chance to socialize outdoors where infection risks are low.

"There is a lot going on, and I'm grateful everyone at PEF is being very, very helpful to me," Abraham said.

# Christopher Dunham, Region 6 Coordinator

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Christopher Dunham is a Registered Nurse at the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, with 21 years of State services. He began his union career as a Shop Steward at SUNY Upstate hospital in 2015. Chris is a visionary leader who has positioned himself to lead his region, which encompasses Hamilton, Herkimer, Fulton, Madison, Montgomery, Lewis, and Oneida into the future by embracing the demographic diversity of careers with a single goal of improved representation for every member. Christopher is seeking the office of Region 6 Coordinator. Chris has served PEF members as Shop Steward and Assistant Council Leader at the Mohawk Correctional Facility in Rome, NY. Chris knows what it means to stand with members in their hour of maximum vulnerability as he experienced firsthand, at interrogations, and as a Nurse working on the COVID-19 Isolation unit. As Regional Coordinator, he intends to focus on



the safe reintegration of PEF members into the post-pandemic worksites, expand COVID-19 mitigation through vaccination literacy and health and safety protocol, strengthen the Regional PAC legislative lobbying for labor-friendly legislation; improve member engagement, support members' appreciation events.

# Barbara Stransky

## Region 7 Coordinator

By KATE MOSTACCIO

As the new Region 7 coordinator, Barbara Stransky plans to increase member engagement efforts, improve communication and ensure that the Region is represented at the executive level.

A PEF member since 2006, Stransky began participating as a union leader in 2018, when she became a steward for Division 242 at her local OPWDD office. As a habilitation specialist in OPWDD IRA group homes, she spends her days helping individuals with intellectual disabilities.

"I encourage people to live their lives to their highest potential," Stransky said.

She says Region 7, the most northern region in the state, needs strong representation.

"I am part of a younger generation that needs to take a more active role in the union," she said. "I will be a strong representative for our large region. I want to bring Region 7 together as one strong region and ensure positive communication with Region 7 members."

She already got the ball rolling on member engagement and communication.



"I have participated and assisted in the planning of many member engagement events within my local division as well as the region," Stransky said. "I have been an active convention delegate. During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the blessings of the previous Regional Coordinator, I created a Region 7 PEF Unofficial Facebook page. This page was critical

for disbursing information to the membership as soon as possible. With this, I also made many connections with fellow Division leaders."

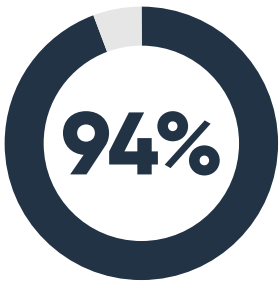


# Unions positively impact public health

By KATE MOSTACCIO

With a spotlight on health as the Delta variant of COVID-19 continues to impact Americans, what role do unions play in the health of their members?

A 2017 study revealed a “10 percent increase in union density was associated with a 17 percent relative decrease in overdose/suicide mortality” and higher wages and access to health benefits and paid sick days positively impact the health of union members.



Unionized workers earn on average 11.2% more in wages than nonunionized peers and 94% of workers covered by a union contract have access to employer-sponsored health benefits, compared with just 68% of nonunion workers. In addition, 91% of unionized

workers have access to paid sick days, compared with 73% of nonunion workers.

[The Economic Policy Institute](#) highlights a report that correlates “a badly broken system governing collective bargaining has eroded unions and worker power” with suffering during the pandemic and extreme economic inequality.

“Now, more than ever, we need strong labor laws to protect working people from the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic,” said Lynn Rhinehart, Economic Policy Institute Senior Fellow and one of the report’s authors. “We need policymakers to use their power to halt and reverse the four-decades-old trend of rising inequality, while also creating meaningful reforms that help workers organize unions.”

In the publication, “Care Without Coverage: Too Little, Too Late” from the Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on the Consequences of Uninsurance, the authors maintain that good insurance equals better health, making the work of unions to provide members with the best insurance benefits they can all the more important.

“The main findings of the report are that working-age Americans without health insurance are more likely to receive

too little medical care and receive it too late; be sicker and die sooner; and receive poorer care when they are in the hospital, even for acute situations like a motor vehicle crash,” the report stated.

The long and continuing fight for better working conditions is also advantageous.

“Unions have historically been involved in creating healthy and safe workplaces, advocating regulations that are monitored and enforced by public health entities such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration,” [an article in the American Journal of Public Health](#) stated. “Autonomy and control over one’s life are associated with positive health outcomes, and social support in the work environment enhances psychological and physical health.”

The article notes the American Public Health Association is on record supporting the role of labor unions in promoting healthy working conditions, health and safety programs, health insurance, and democratic participation.

Contracts, the article authors argue, are a key component of improving the lives and the health of union members.

“One mechanism unions use to promote public health is the union contract,” the article states. “These are legally binding, durable over a designated time, and specific. They are durable because they cannot be unilaterally changed, and contracts that follow often build on the progress of previous negotiations. Even after a contract expires, federal labor law provides a process and momentum for the negotiation of a new one. We hypothesized that union contracts promote the health status of workers.”

Check out what your union benefits are on the [PEF Membership Benefits website](#). Check out your [contract](#) on the PEF website.

# Help spread the word to save this PEF retiree's son

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

A retired PEF Region 8 member needs your help finding a kidney donor for his son.

Ron Lammerts was a principle capital program analyst for the state Department of Transportation when he retired from state service in 2016. His son, Justin, is 36 and is a former New York State employee and member of the Civil Service Employees Association.

Justin Lammerts was born with a heart defect and received a heart transplant at age 12 but the medications he must take to protect the transplanted heart have been gradually damaging both of his kidneys over the ensuing 24 years. Now his kidneys are failing and he is expected to begin dialysis soon, but the heart transplant will make that process more challenging for him. So far, four potential donors including a close family member, have all been ruled out, so the family is casting a wider net in its urgent search to find a donor for Justin.

"I am endeavoring to find organizations or people from other areas who are aligned with civic or social clubs such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus, Lions or others that could post our [flyer](#) soliciting a kidney donor," Ron Lammerts said. You also can help spread the word by sharing this information on your social media accounts and with your family and friends.



Justin Lammerts

If you, or someone you know, is interested in donating a kidney to Justin Lammerts, please call the Duke Health Transplant Center, Living Donor Program at 919-613-7777 or 800-249-5864.



## Leave donations:

By Sherry Halbrook

# 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.

- Edward Carey is a supervising computer operator at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany. Call 518-457-4272;
- Lisa Colbert is an infection control nurse at Sunmount Developmental Disabilities Services Office in Tupper Lake. Call 518-359-4158;
- Kendra Delorme is a nurse 2 psychiatric at St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center and assigned to St. Lawrence Alcohol Treatment Center in Ogdensburg. Call 315-541-2001;
- Eric Huntington is a project manager 3 at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany. Call 518-457-4272;
- Julie Hutchinson is a nurse 2 at Rochester Psychiatric Center in Rochester. Call 585-241-1900;
- Crystal Perry is a nurse 2 psychiatric at Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse. Call 315-426-3600;
- Jaquaia Reid is a licensed social worker 2 at Bronx Psychiatric Center in New York City. Call 929-348-4024;
- Lydia Seales-Fuller is a nurse 2 psychiatric at Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse. Call 315-426-3600;
- Christine Thayer is a manager ITS 1 data at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany. Call 518-457-4272; and
- Paula Wilcox 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](mailto:thecomunicator@pef.org), or call 800-342-4306, ext. 271. Be sure to provide your contact information.







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Keeping PEF members current on PEF news, emailed  
to your mobile device or home computer monthly.

[www.pef.org/ecommunicator-signup/](http://www.pef.org/ecommunicator-signup/)



# Letters to the Editor

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### Hey PEF, back your parole officers

To the Editor:

As many in the state may, or may not know, our job (of parole officer) is currently under siege by politicians and knee-jerk legislation.

As NYS parole officers, we are tasked with the supervision of violent felons upon their release from state prison facilities. We work long hours and often find ourselves in dangerous situations.

Since March of last year, our job duties, discretion and power have been slowly eroded. There is now legislation awaiting the governor's signature that would, in Layman's terms, make it almost impossible to take these people out of the community when they are found in violation of supervision conditions.

While there were many rallies, signs and outcry for those on the inside, our union did nothing to attempt to garner support in our ranks and have our voices heard. Instead, we were subject to the victory lap of the new contract by our leadership.

I ask, PEF, where are you?

**MATT CALLAGHAN**  
Schenectady

**Editor's note:** The writer is mistaken in assuming that PEF has done nothing to oppose the Less Is More legislation that Gov. Kathy Hochul has signed into law. PEF always has strongly opposed this and other bills in the Legislature and on the governor's desk that undermine the authority of parole officers and their ability to shepherd parolees while always protecting the safety of the public. PEF has repeatedly and vigorously lobbied and testified on these issues.

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### What about retro pay for retirees?

To the Editor:

I retired from the NYS Office of Mental Health effective 4/1/2021 and I'm wondering what the process is for retirees who are due retroactive pay now that PEF has settled the PS&T contract.

Since I am no longer on the "payroll," but receiving retirement benefits, I assume I will not receive the retroactive pay when the active employees receive theirs in November.

Thank you for your help.

**CINDY CRANDALL**  
Rome, NY

**Editor's Note:** The Office of the State Comptroller will calculate retroactive pay due to former state PS&T employees who retired from state service after the 2016-19 contract expired April 1, 2019. The OSC also will calculate if that retroactive pay affected the retiree's final average salary and the OSC will adjust the retiree's pension accordingly. The OSC will begin this process for retirees after it completes making retroactive payments to current PS&T employees in November. Retirees do not need to request or apply to receive their retroactive pay or the adjustment to their pension.

## Support mask mandate

To the Editor:

PEF should support the mask mandate, not oppose it.

**ALLAN KOLODNY**  
New York

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## Defend my right to live

To the Editor:

Once again, why are you, my union, defending people who will be endangering my health and life?

If I have to work with a partner, or sit next to a co-worker who refuses to be vaccinated, I expect my union to protect MY rights to live and be healthy. Please stop defending these uninformed and, in my opinion, lazy people.

Their right to die and get sick should not infringe on my right to live and be healthy. Do I have a right to drink and drive? If I disagree with that law, would the union defend my rights? No, because it is a danger to myself and others.

There is no excuse, except a proven true medical excuse, for not being vaccinated.

As a union member, I want you to defend my right to live, rather than their non-existent rights to kill me or make me ill. This type of union activity is not why I stayed a union member. This is not a benefit for membership. Please rethink your stance on mandatory vaccination.

**FRANK BUCELLO**  
Glen Cove

**Editor's Note:** PEF is obligated by law, by contract and by the PEF constitution to defend its members' rights to due process protections against discipline and termination. The union also is obligated to negotiate the effect, such as loss of job and loss of license to practice, that the vaccination and testing mandates may have on PEF members. The union is continuously working to protect the on-the-job health and safety of every member.

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## PEF should support mandating vaccine

To the Editor:

Support the vaccine mandate.

**MARY ELLEN CLARK**  
Rochester

## **Get vax, go to work**

To the Editor:

If your job requires that you get a vaccine, get the vaccine. This is required at all hospitals and nursing homes.

And all of these people wanting to stay home, and work from home is ridiculous. You can't go to work because you have asthma and high blood pressure? Seriously? Stop all of this madness.

**DONNA BAKER**  
**Medina**

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## **Why is COVID still top PEF concern?**

To the Editor

Why? I am vaccinated!

However in the 1918 epidemic there was no vaccine and no media or UNIONS to spread fear! Within two years it disappeared! Consider that before spreading fear!

**PETER AMES**  
**Dansville**







# Ready to retire? Join PEF Retirees; It's looking out for you

We've just turned the page on summer, celebrated Labor Day and now we're heading into fall. The Delta variant is extending the never ending Covid-19 pandemic, causing many workers to be afraid of going back to work. In this current economic climate workers who can retire are choosing to do so. Many state workers are in this group and are choosing to retire when they are eligible to receive their pensions.

The PEF Retirees active membership is growing as we continue to advocate for a secure retirement for all workers. The PEF Retirees Office works diligently on behalf of PEF Retiree members. The officers and Retiree Executive Board members strive to protect the benefits of PEF Retirees that were earned during their careers in state service. We continue to keep our members informed on the issues and political climate that will have an impact on members' earned benefits.

Membership in PEF Retirees is not automatic; you need to apply and pay dues. Membership in the PEF Retirees is free for the first year for eligible state employees who retired after April 2006. Thereafter, the membership dues are paid monthly if a member elects to have the dues automatically deducted from their NYS pension.

That's how 75 percent of PEF Retiree members elect to pay their membership dues.

As public-sector workers with a defined benefit pension, we are more fortunate than many private-sector workers.

As Americans work longer into their lives due to the extremely high cost of retirement, workers may begin to face age discrimination. While some economists posit that COVID is responsible for many Americans retiring against their wishes and earlier than they had expected, this current situation only represents a continuation of an existing pre-pandemic trend.

A new study that reviewed data from 2010-2018 shows the trend toward age discrimination in the workplace is far worse than previously thought. Fifty-five percent of older workers (workers age 55+) in the bottom half of the income distribution were forced to leave the workforce before they had hoped to retire, with that number only marginally better for middle class workers aged 55+ (32%).

"This study tells us things we already knew--that older workers are being unjustly pushed out of the workforce," said Joseph Peters Jr., secretary-treasurer of the Alliance for Retired Americans. "We must ensure that older workers are not discriminated against. The U.S. Senate can help by passing H.R. 2062, the Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act of 2021, as soon as possible."

As an organization that works to keep our members informed, active and engaged, we encourage you to take action on H.R. 2062, the Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act of 2021. Contact your U.S. senators – Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand for New York – and tell them all workers deserve respect, fairness and freedom from discrimination.



**October 7, 2021**

PEF Organizing spent the last three days in the most northern region celebrating our members. And what an amazing turn out!

Ogdensburg CF 30 out of 33

Riverview CF 38 out of 52

Gouverneur CF 44 out of 53

OPWDD 102 out of 241 - with telecommuting still in place.



**September 29, 2021**

Scenes from the Region 8 Pre-Convention dinner held Sept. 28 at the Desmond in Albany. Delegates heard from PEF leaders and staff, reviewed Robert's Rules of Order, and previewed the 27 resolutions up for consideration.





**September 25, 2021**

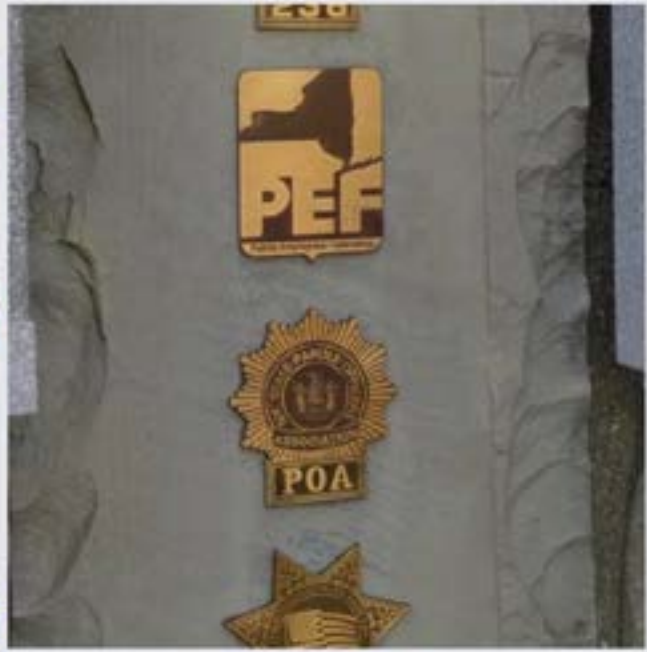
Region 7 delegates were joined by PEF Vice President Sharon DeSilva and Elaine from the PEF Membership Benefits Program for their pre-Convention dinner at Donovan's in Malone, N.Y.



**September 23, 2021**

PEF Vaccine Mandate discussion held yesterday with members in Region 1 Division 196 at Roswell Park. Regional Coordinator Michele Silsby along with PEF Legal, Field Services and Health and Safety were there to answer questions.





**September 15, 2021**

DOCCS Commissioner Anthony Annucci invited PEF President Wayne Spence to lay a wreath at the Parole Officers and Corrections Officers memorial in downtown Albany this morning to pay tribute to officers who have fallen in the line of duty.





**September 14, 2021**

PEF President Wayne Spence, members, retirees and other disabilities services organizations joined State Senator John Mannion in Albany today to rally in opposition of budget cuts that are gutting services at the Office of People With Developmental Disabilities.

