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# EXECUTIVE

# BUDGET

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FY 2023



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## THE COMMUNICATOR

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# The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



## Budget Negotiations Show PEF's Power

We are in the final stretch of New York State budget negotiations. As I said when the executive budget was first released, this year's budget contains more positive signs for public employees than any previous proposal since I've been president of PEF. Thanks to your activism and the tireless work of our political action committees statewide and at the regional level, we are being heard. This month, we held our [annual Nurse Lobby Day](#) to spotlight our concerns with the healthcare proposals in the budget and I'm told by participants that PEF's input was very well received. If you haven't yet added your voice to the union's various budget priorities, [please visit this page and send a letter to your lawmakers](#) about the issues that matter to you.

During the budget cycle, we've also created videos each week highlighting PEF members who are impacted by the lack of resources, staff and funding that have severely impacted the services many state agencies provide to New Yorkers. If you haven't found time to watch them yet, [we have gathered them all here](#) and will continue to add videos each week. For those of you who prefer to read and not watch, we are transcribing the videos as featured "Q&As" here in *The Communicator*.

Also in this issue, I'd like to draw your attention to an [alarming story from Brooklyn](#), where a team of PEF parole officers has earned the nickname "Gun Snatchers" for the number of weapons they have taken off the streets this year. We've said for months that the so-called "Less is More" parole law, which went into full effect on March 1 — is likely to lead to an increase in crime by parolees who now have fewer consequences tied to their behavior. We hope stories like this help lawmakers see that the danger to community safety is real, and we need additional parole officers to handle the caseloads along with enhanced services for parolees who need help with things like housing, job training and addiction services in order to become productive members of society.

Finally, we have the first of many committee profiles in this issue. [The New York City Women's Committee](#) has reactivated and joined our Statewide Women's Committee to sponsor a series of events during Women's History Month. I draw your attention in particular to the March 31 deadline for nominating "PEF Heroines." I've met hundreds of them as president of PEF, so [please nominate your co-workers today](#) so we can recognize them in a future issue.

As winter slowly gives way to spring around the state, I hope this finds you healthy and ready for whatever the new season brings. I assure you your union will continue to stand strong and fight for your rights and protections at work.

In Unity,

A stylized, 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

# Nurses share stories of short staffing, mandatory overtime and toxic workplace culture with legislators during Lobby Day

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Never has the spotlight shone so brightly on the health care profession than during the COVID-19 pandemic. That's why now is the perfect time for PEF to ride the wave and influence legislation to introduce hazard pay bonuses, improve nursing recruitment and retention, revamp the Tier 6 pension plan, subsidize SUNY hospitals and address toxic workplaces.

PEF nurses took to Zoom on March 2 to lobby for these initiatives and more.

Participating legislators or their staff included Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi (AD28), Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther (AD100), Assemblyman Tom Abinanti (AD92), Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz (AD81), Assemblyman Richard Gottfried (AD75), Assemblywoman Mathylde Frontus (AD46), Assemblyman John McDonald (AD108), Sen. John Mannion (AD50), Sen. Karines Reyes (AD87), Sen. Samra Brouk (SD55), Sen. Rachel May (SD53), Sen. Sean Ryan (SD60), Sen. Jim Tedisco (SD49), Sen. Jamaal Bailey (SD36), Sen. Phil Boyle (SD4), Sen. John Brooks (SD8) and Sen. Todd Kaminsky (SD9).

## Hazard pay, reduce contract nurses

At the top of the list of budget priorities is the Healthcare Workforce Bonus proposed by Gov. Kathy Hochul, providing up to \$3,000 for employees earning less than \$125,000. While the proposal includes all state agencies, private and public sector hospitals, EMS, home care and hospices professionals, PEF maintains it needs further amending.

"We feel we need to smooth out some of the loose ends in the language," said PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons. "It's important that we recognize all the heroes – all essential state employees including those charged with testing, contact tracing, sample work – people who exposed themselves to COVID in service to the state. We'd like to see this expanded and we really want to stress the importance of parity with private providers."

Vincent Cicatello, a PEF nurse at Buffalo Psychiatric Center, shared with legislators that PEF members face overwhelming workloads and schedules, and a bonus would be a morale boost.



"Many of our members have worked while sick throughout the whole pandemic," he said. "Worked long, extended hours. Are worn down and feel defeated. A lot of them are saying, 'What about us?' I think this would do a lot of good for our members to get this extra bonus."

A similar story plays out at Roswell Park. "We have members who worked 21, even 28, days in a row because of the pandemic," said Michele Silsby, a senior case manager and PEF's Region 1 Coordinator. "Our patients are all critically ill, so you can only imagine how exhausted our nurses are, not only physically but mentally as well."

Legislators were supportive of hazard pay.

"We always want to hear what you have to say," said Sen. Mannion. "We don't make decisions without PEF's voice in it. We handled things so well during the pandemic because we have competent, well-trained, supported employees out there. New York state is the gold standard when it comes to these professions."

"I'm in favor of expanding the (hazardous pay) bonus to effect more titles," said Assemblyman Abinanti.

The state's solution to staffing woes has traditionally been to bring in contract nurses to fill gaps and assist overtaxed full-



time staff. It's a quick fix, not a solution, PEF members argue. Contract nurses may not have the necessary skills, can't be mandated to work overtime and are paid exponentially higher, among other issues.

"The fewer contract nurses, the better," said Silsby. "You want the best nurse at your bedside. When you have contract nurses floating in and out, you really do put your patients and your own license at risk. The error rate is higher and there is a lack of patient satisfaction."

Some contract nurses are woefully unprepared for the jobs. Cicatello said some of the contract nurses brought into Buffalo Psych Center won't leave the nurses' station.

"They are terrified of the psychiatric patients," he said. "They are just not experienced in dealing with them. It's not effective nursing. How are these patients going to recover?"

The pay difference is staggering and a waste of taxpayer dollars when the state could spend that money on recruiting and retaining permanent staff.

"It's just not cost effective," said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio. "You are bringing in people who are making significantly more money than the people they are working next to. It's disrespectful."

"While state nurses need and want help, bringing in agency and travel nurses only creates deep resentment among existing staff," said SUNY Stony Brook nurse Nora Higgins, who is also PEF's Region 12 Coordinator. "The agency and travel nurses are paid up to four times as much as the state nurses who start at salary grade 14 and may advance to a grade 16."

Contract nurses even outnumber full-time staff at some locations.

"Where I work at Rochester Psychiatric Center, 60 percent of the nurses are agency nurses (not state employees)," said PEF nurse Bradley Jonas. "We have just 17 state nurses left. The rest are all agency nurses. It's a Band-Aid on a much bigger problem. I've only worked for the state for 2.5 years and I've seen only 23 or 24 hires. I've seen 25 to 30 walk out the door."

Legislators and their representatives were supportive and attentive to PEF's priorities.

"Our fight should be that we should not be relying on contract nurses," said Assemblywoman Reyes. "These nurses are making more an hour than nurses who have been there for years."

"We are going to do everything we possibly can for you," said Sen. Boyle.

## **Tier 6 reform and loan repayment incentive**

State employment used to be an avenue to a secure and dignified retirement. The implementation of the Tier 6 pension plan changed all that.

"It's important to recognize state agencies, in regard to nurses in particular, are very difficult to staff," DiAntonio said. "The pay is less. People tend to stay for the health benefits and the pension. Now we see a lot of people coming in to get experience and leaving for the private sector to increase their wages."

PEF advocates for revising Tier 6 pension structure to mirror Tier 4 levels.

"No employer can expect workers to wait 10 years before earning benefits and expect to keep people," Lyons said. "The state of New York is simply unable to compete with the private sector. Sensible Tier 6 reform will provide a significant attraction and retention incentive so the state can meet its workforce needs over the short and long-term."

PEF proposes modifying Tier 6 to reduce the vesting from 10 years to 5 years, reduce the amount of employee contribution from 6 percent to 3 percent, and base Final Average Salary on the highest paid three years, not the highest paid five.

"Last year, state workers logged 19 million hours of overtime," Lyons said. When the comptroller looks back at salaries and adjusts employee contributions, the union maintains that overtime should be recognized in pension wage calculations, but not count against employees when calculating contributions.

"We are losing our senior nurses, and the new nurses are Tier 6 and don't want to stay," said Mary Margaret Krukonis, a PEF nurse at Mohawk Psychiatric Center. "I came in at Tier 4. I would not come to work for the state today at Tier 6."

In addition to hazard pay and pension reform, the union supports the Nurse Loan Repayment Program to address recruitment and retention.

The program, as proposed, would only apply to registered nurses. PEF advocates for expanding the bill to include licensed professional nurses, nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists, as well as clarifying "underserved area" to include all state agencies.

## **Subsidize SUNY hospitals, oppose shifting license oversight from DOE to DOH**

SUNY hospitals – Downstate, Upstate and Stony Brook – offer top patient care and led the way throughout the COVID-19

pandemic in their communities. While the budget does include funding for the hospitals, PEF maintains it's not enough to address shortfalls caused by the pandemic.

"We are asking for \$100 million to shore up the SUNY hospital system," said Lyons. "These institutions train the most minority doctors and nurses in the state. They are nationally recognized and are the only teaching hospitals in New York. We have a severe workforce shortage; this could help us meet that demand."

There must be changes to make the state competitive as an employer.

"All our health facilities are demoralized," said DiAntonio. "The state is paying tons of money to hire contract nurses, travel nurses, but they are not looking internally to support the nurses they already have. They are no longer a competitive employer."

In the Health and Mental Health budget, Part C, the governor proposes shifting oversight and licensure from the Department of Education to the Department of Health for all health care professionals, including nurses, psychiatrists, physical therapists and mental health professionals, among others.

PEF opposes this legislation.

"Our concern is about direct gubernatorial control over the healthcare professions," Lyons said. "The DOH commissioner is appointed by the Governor while the State Education Department works underneath the Board of Regents. We don't want politics infused into these professions. We feel like, if it's not broke, why are we trying to fix it?"

### **Confront toxic workplace**

A culture of disrespect at worksites across the state also needs to be addressed, PEF members said.

In one Office of Mental Health facility, a member of management yelled at nurses, kicked a Sharps container across the floor and was allegedly heard muttering, "I love watching them scurry when I walk on the floor." In another, a

doctor got right up in a nurse's face to scream at her, spraying spit on her face. She filed a complaint, but the final decision was to leave the doctor where he was and move her.

"People shouldn't have to endure such abuse," Higgins said.

Legislators were appalled at the treatment.

"You guys have a staffing problem. It's definitely a policy issue," said Assemblywoman Reyes, a nurse herself. "You guys have a very toxic culture. That's just unacceptable."

"It's awful to hear," said Sen. Mannion. "I hate hearing the stories, it shouldn't be happening. You know you have a lot of allies in my conference, and we are going to continue making sure your members aren't forgotten in there."

PEF supports legislation to promote building healthy worksites and holding employers accountable.

"Workplace bullying is real and has real consequences for workers and the people that they service," Lyons said. "Employees, especially nurses and other health care employees, should not be forced to endure workplace bullying, abuse or harassment or the stress, anxiety, humiliation or depression that stem from such actions."

The New York State Legislature must finalize the state budget by the end of March. You can read a full breakdown of PEF's budget priorities [here](#). And if you haven't participated yet, you can write your elected lawmakers in support of PEF's priorities [here](#).



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BROOKLYN 1 – State parole officers at the Brooklyn 1 station have become so productive in getting guns and other contraband off the streets that they’re now known as the Gun Snatchers. Shown are: (Back row) Parole Officers Ancrum, Ramirez, Lisoba, Cheyne, Hibbert, Cortez and Montanez; (Middle row) Parole Officers Colon, Mack, Ellis-Gill, Guelbart, Rivera, Payne, Ayala and Martindale; (Front row) Parole Officers Brown and Samuels, Senior Parole Officer Bell, Bureau Chief Granum and Parole Officers Roberson and Fernandez.

## Parole officers protect public from illegal guns, weapons

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Illegal guns and other weapons are part of a growing problem of violent crime in communities nationwide. Getting them off the streets has created a sense of pride and even a friendly rivalry between two state parole offices in Brooklyn.

Guns, other weapons, ammunition, drugs, fraudulent credit cards, fake IDs and machines used by scammers are all deemed criminal contraband that parolees are not allowed to have, and when parole officers have reason to think contraband may be present, they go out in teams of eight officers to conduct thorough “safety searches” for it.

Denise Granum, bureau chief of parole office Brooklyn 1, said the 22 officers at that station — who supervise approximately 1,100 parolees — have become so good at getting contraband off the streets that they have earned the nickname “Gun Snatchers.” In fact, she said, the Brooklyn 1 officers are now rivaling the Brooklyn 4 officers, where she was formerly the bureau chief. The Brooklyn 4 group earned the nickname “Bumble Bees” for their success in finding guns and contraband.

Granum said she was preparing to present 50 letters of commendation to the Brooklyn 1 officers in early March for their outstanding efforts.

“We got 13 guns just since January and four more last Friday. They found a gun that was kept on a shoe rack,” Granum said. “The parolee could just grab his shoes and his gun whenever he wanted to go out.”

In a very different case, the officers found a safe that contained five guns including high powered rifles and extended ammo clips with 50 rounds, which are meant for military use. They also found two additional guns and substantial cash on that search. A stolen US Postal Service master key was found that could be used to rob personal and business post office boxes.

“We believe the parolee was posing as a postal worker,” said Granum.



"It's alarming because the parolees sometimes have more powerful weapons than our officers have. We've also found a 3-foot machete, brass knuckles, and big knives," the bureau chief said.

Gang activity is a major factor in leading parolees into violating the terms of their parole and committing crimes," Granum said.

"We would typically find 13 to 14 guns in a year, but we just brought in 15 in 43 days and 10 of those were in three days."

The Brooklyn 1 officers, who are predominantly female, are excited to be able to do this important work, their chief said. "When the word goes out that we are putting together a safety search team, they all want to be on it."

Brooklyn 1 has a code word they use when they spot a gun, and now they have a teddy bear with a T-shirt that has that word at the station. The bear is a symbol of their success and Granum said she also has decorated a wall at the station with awards and signs of their prowess as "Gun Snatchers."

"We can't let the parolees take over. We must make sure we maintain discipline. We're going to do what we have to do to keep people safe."



**CONFISCATED** – A few of the many guns and ammo seized by the parole officers of Brooklyn 1 are shown here. The officers recently found these items and other contraband while conducting safety searches.



**OUTSTANDING WORK!** – Fifty commendations were awarded in early March to parole officers at station Brooklyn 1 for their recent exemplary performance on the job. The officers, some of whom received multiple commendations, are recognized for actions that include their success in finding and seizing guns, ammunition and other contraband to protect public safety. When they find criminal contraband, the parole officers call in the New York City Police Department to confiscate it and arrest those who were in possession of it. Pictured are: Parole Officers Tamia Brown, Nancy Ayala, Christopher Lisboa, Laika Payne, Bureau Chief Denise Granum, and Parole Officers Brenda Mack, Colleen Martindale, Candace Roberson, Michelle Fernandez and Keywinn Montanez.



# Back up and running: NYC members revitalize regional Women's Committee

With Women's History Month in March, it's fitting that PEF leaders in New York City are reviving the NYC Women's Committee – with Michele Rosello chairing the committee, joined by Gwendolyn Culpepper and Vivian Falto-Lequerique.

## Michele Rosello



A clinical social worker at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens, Rosello, a PEF member since 2013, loves helping clients and fellow union members in her roles as social worker and council leader.

"I believe being a social worker and council leader is one in the same," she said. "My mission and greatest joy is helping others.

As a social worker on a psychiatric admissions in-patient unit, I am helping patients with accepting their illness and current situation, in addition to helping their families accept the diagnosis and all the events that come with mental health.

"As a council leader, I am helping members navigate their way through investigations of allegations, recoupment of wages earned, assistance with professional development and, sometimes, just being available to listen makes all the difference in the world," she said.

Rosello looks forward to the NYC Women's Committee becoming a resource for members in Regions 10 and 11.

"There is a strength in numbers, and I believe this is an opportunity to further the development of our union sisters by providing education for empowerment and leadership, in addition to the emotional support and validation that will help our sisters grow," she said.

## Gwendolyn Culpepper



Helping people with developmental disabilities is a passion for Culpepper, who works as a recreational therapist for OPWDD's Bernard Fineson Developmental Center in Queens Village.

"What I love most about my job is that I get to provide individuals with a sense of normalcy by utilizing various recreational activities, which brings them joy and happiness," she said. "As for me, their smiles are the greatest reward."

A PEF member for 16 years, she hopes the NYC Women's Committee will inspire women to continue to fight for equality.

"My hope is that we can come together to create a healthy environment in which women know they are not alone and are comfortable enough to express their ideas and concerns," Culpepper said.

## Vivan Falto-Lequerique



As a regional associate at the State Education Department in New York City, Falto-Lequerique enjoys working with schools and families on behalf of students with disabilities.

A PEF member for more than 20 years, she is excited to work on women's issues in Regions 10 and 11.

"I would love, in collaboration with my union sisters, to provide a safe space for women in labor to get empowered, feel supported as a union member, and together further our personal and professional skills," she said.

### Upcoming events

The NYC Women's Committee is hosting two "Sip and Chat" Zoom meetings, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. March 11 and 25 for members to gather and chat. [Click here to register.](#)

During Women's History Month, PEF is hosting a series of women-led Zoom programs each Tuesday in March, as well as honoring Everyday PEF Heroines in the April issue of The Communicator.

The first 100 PEF Heroine nominees will receive a Rosie the Riveter button and certificate. To nominate a PEF heroine, visit <https://www.pef.org/everyday-pef-heroine/> and submit a nomination form by March 31.

All PEF members are invited to join their union brothers and sisters for the remaining Tuesday Talks in March, as follows:

**March 15:** Paige Saakyan, a PEF occupational safety and health specialist and member of PEF staff's USW 9265, will present The Guide to Good Posture and Back Health.

**March 22:** Region 11 Licensed Clinical Social Worker Michele Rosello and Region 1 RN Lorita Mitchell will present together on Mental Health Prevention through Exercise and Self-Care Strategies.

All Zoom meetings will be from 6:30 — 7:30 p.m.  
[Follow this link to register for these events.](#)

The committee will end the month with a flourish, hosting a trio of powerful women on **Wednesday, March 30, at 6 p.m.** for discussion about "Strengthening Women's Leadership." New York Attorney General Tish James, U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-N.Y.) and NYS Sen. Jessica Ramos (D-13) will answer questions and participate in what is sure to be a lively discussion. Members must register using this link, where you can also submit questions for the speakers in advance.



N.Y. Attorney General  
Tish James



U.S. Rep.  
Grace Meng (D-N.Y.)



NYS Sen. Jessica  
Ramos (D-13)



# SUNY members share COVID stories; emphasize staffing woes and quality patient care at SUNY hospitals

Compiled by KATE MOSTACCIO

The COVID pandemic shone a light on the state's nursing and healthcare heroes, but it also highlighted the consequences of decades of austerity budgets and reduced staffing in the industry. During the October 2021 PEF Convention in Niagara Falls, members at SUNY Upstate, SUNY Downstate and SUNY Stony Brook sat down with PEF to discuss how the pandemic and short staffing impact their jobs, what their jobs mean to their communities and why they chose to do what they do.

## How does COVID and short staffing impact your work?

"I'm fairly new to thinking about this in terms of what the state can do for us instead of what I can be doing for my state. The answer to that, I hear people thanking us, which is fantastic. We've gotten some movement passed, we're getting double and a half overtime, which is fantastic. Money only goes so far though, for us. Really what we need is more hands. We need more hands to do the work that we've been doing in the past year and a half. There was a push for more staff and then it kind of fell by the wayside. It's difficult to do the job taking care of people in the worst period of their entire lives when you don't have enough people watching your back, being able to cover for you when you're in with a very sick patient and there is another patient equally as sick next door who just starts to crash when you're in the middle of a very critical scenario. More staff, for me, that would be the best-case scenario at this moment in time because we're burnt out. No qualms in saying that: we're burnt out."

**Samuel Pehling, ICU nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"During COVID, although we are a student-based health center, we also became a testing site for staff that still needed to come on site. We actually spoke to a local lab, and we became the testers and submitted it to that actual lab. It was a lot of teamwork, a lot of recalibrations, shifting, really getting used to embracing change because the routine was not the same anymore. We were certainly being creative to maintain the safety of the campus community and the community outside.

Retention has been an issue, not only due to the pandemic; we can't compete with the private sector. We do our best to

maintain work as a team. We're hustling. With college nursing, it really is a primary care for the students. We have medical doctors, we have an OB/GYN on site, we have medications that students can just come in and if they are prescribed it, they get it right then and there. Nurses also go out and do programming for sexual violence awareness, suicide awareness; we cover and teach on a lot of different topics that college students can face. We're constantly educating."

**Adele Gutierrez, college health nurse,  
SUNY College at Westbury**

"It was very, very challenging for the frontline workers, nurses to be at the bedside, every morning, every day. The number of patients that were coming into the hospital, especially into the ICU, was overwhelming our usual capacity of 1 to 2 nurse ratio in the ICU. Each day I come to work, I'm crying and I have no break and I have to take care of these patients that the outcome at the end of my day was sad. I see these patients dying. They come in; they're doing very well. In the next few hours to the next day, they are not talking and transitioned to the other world. I could not believe my eyes, being an ICU nurse for over 13 years, but wrapping bodies which come in every day, talking to me and in the next 24 hours they are no more talking to me. It was very stressful."

**Diana Potakey, nurse,  
SUNY Downstate**

"We're burnt out. I feel there are days when I go to work and I feel like I'm wearing a hat that has different titles and I just have to turn that hat every day; I'm a housekeeper, I'm a cleaner, I'm a caregiver, I'm a patient advocate. It's a problem, it's a problem everywhere. This double time and a half is not an incentive for me; I go to work and I can't wait to go home these days. That wasn't always the case as a nurse. We love our job, we love to go to work, I love to take care of my patients, I want them to get the best care possible - but at the end of the day, we're so exhausted and I only work eight-hour shifts, I don't work the 12-hour shifts. You don't get out of work on time, and you can't just walk off the floor if you don't have relief. That's becoming a problem."

**Debra Delgiorno, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**



"On my unit, usually the staffing was very, very bad. As everyone knows, it wasn't only us, it was everywhere. My unit consists of nine ICU beds; during the pandemic sometimes, we only have two nurses to work with nine patients. When I say nine patients, nine intubated, critically ill patients on drips and everything."

**Georgette Persona, nurse,  
SUNY Downstate**

"In the beginning of the pandemic, it was like a war zone. It was nothing I'd ever seen in my 19 years I was there. It was really crazy. Patients were super sick. They weren't like normal ICU patients where we could just give them a little bit of medication, they were eating through their sedation – the COVID did some weird stuff to them. It took a lot of pain medication, a lot of sedation to keep them sedated so they would be OK on a ventilator. They were super sick. Sometimes they would have gastrointestinal bleeds, sometimes they were throwing clots. It was just a crazy virus."

**Barbara Coniglio, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"Some units were devastated and there was nobody there to fill in because we are already working short. That is a big concern right now. I'm affected as well in my neonatal intensive care unit, people just left New York. They up and left. We had a lot of young girls, they said, 'You know forget this, I'll be a travel nurse and go to a state where this isn't a mandate right now.' Now you're picking up more work than is reasonable and who are you hurting, you're hurting the poor patients in the bed or the poor babies in the neonatal intensive care unit."

**Nora Higgins, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"Without funding, we lack the resources for education for nurses. We really need that; we need to have more education. We have a younger nursing population that's coming in and we the seasoned nurses are not saying they aren't valued, but I think we are more oriented to the traditional nursing aspect of it, so funding would really help to provide the additional resources that we need in terms of education for nurses so that they can understand and tap into what it really means to be a resourceful nurse."

**Joan Rosegreen, ER nurse,  
SUNY Downstate**

"We've been short staffed for years. Years, and years, and years and the pandemic has just sort of manifested that. People have left nursing all together. What we're finding now, what I'm seeing every day, is we still try to take care of the patients the best that we can, but it's really limited. I've been nursing for a little over 13 ½ years on the same unit. I'm a surgical

trauma critical care nurse and of the most experienced people I think I can count on both my hands who is actually there. We have all these new people in and they just continue to cycle and cycle and cycle. They leave the SUNY system, specifically SUNY Stony Brook, and I'm sure SUNY Downstate and Upstate, because our salaries aren't competitive anymore."

The nursing shortage is a real thing and there are recruiters across the country who will call our unit, find out who we are on social media and then they send us messages and offer us, frankly, significant financial incentives to leave our current job to go work for them. So, again, like I said, I work in the sickest ICU in Suffolk County, people know what our skillset is supposed to be so we receive tremendous offers to go work for institutions across the country and provide, frankly, education and care to Americans across the country."

**Amy Pacholk, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"During the pandemic it was very difficult. I saw a lot of patients come in very sick, could hardly breath. It was very, very difficult trying to comfort or explain to the family member without them being too alarmed about how the patient was doing. All COVID patients were coming to our facility. One thing that I remember was a patient came in with COVID and her cellphone was dead. It wasn't charged, so when she came up, she was on bi-pap and we were going to intubate her. Just before it was known that she was going to go on a mechanical ventilator, she let me know her cellphone was dead and her children didn't know she was there. She was telling me that while she was on the bi-pap, trying to convey that to me. She de-sated and we intubated her and she didn't make it. We had to call her family with whatever contact information we had."

We didn't have enough nurses, we didn't have enough staff, we didn't have enough PPE, it was just very difficult. We were fighting for everything. I want to say that the union, President Spence, made sure that he listened to whatever complaints we had during that time and he came and he distributed PPE, masks and whatever else he could get his hands on. Which let us know that he was in there with us, fighting with us, and we were being heard. Somebody was hearing us."

**Cynthia Walker, nurse,  
SUNY Downstate**

"We lack supplies; it's crazy that I could walk into a supermarket and there will be masks on the counter, but for us, we literally have to hunt masks down, we have to hunt down gowns some days, because everything is under lock and key. If the person with the key isn't there, how do you get your supplies?"

**Karey Gosevski, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

## Why do we need the state to Fund Our Future?

"My patients are safest at Stony Brook. I didn't realize how different things should actually be run until I went to Stony Brook. If I had an emergency situation at a community hospital and I need help, I might get two people in that room to help me. At Stony Brook, if I call for help, I have 30 people in my room. Right there, that says it all."

**Debra Delgiorno, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"If New York state doesn't fund or fill these positions, then we are going to have to try running operating rooms with the number of nurses that we have and fewer patients are going to be able to get the surgeries that they need because we cannot support safe surgeries with the surgeons and nursing staff that we are currently under."

**Michael Doyle, OR nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"We provide service for high prescription patients that the outside community will not service quite often. We see more high prescriptions probably than any place in the country. The places on the outside will definitely not take care of these people. If we didn't take care of these people, a lot of people would be out of luck and not be able to be seen."

**Darwin Richmond, optician,  
NY College of Optometry**

"We have a lot of gifts and talents and education to offer the public. This is a passion, it's a calling, it's not an easy job. All of us who became nurses and want to take care of these people want to help you. We want to help you live, we want to have you return to your normal life, whatever that will be for you because sometimes you'll never return to what your normal was, so we try to help you manifest pride in who you are so you can walk away and be great."

**Amy Pacholk, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"I think our hospital is great and I think our staff that we have is incredible. We have a purpose, we want to make a difference. In my job, I want to have an impact on that new mom becoming a mom for the first time. It's a privilege and I enjoy being a part of that."

**Debra Delgiorno, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"I started as psychiatric nurse in OMH. It was a fascinating field, I loved it, I loved my patients, we had a good time. What I liked about state service is the pension. Everything that you get, especially being within a union, there is a sense of security, job security, you know if anything was to happen you can call somebody and you have those supports for you."

**Adele Gutierrez, college health nurse,  
SUNY College at Westbury**

"A lot of the times you feel like you weren't helpful enough and you see how much other nurses were struggling and suffering. I believe that if the state doesn't fund us, not only the nurse's physical well-being will go down, also their psychological well-being will go down. I believe as a nurse you have to be healthy and stay healthy physically and psychologically in order to promote health and I feel like this is one of the most important things. If we're not funded, if we have less nurses taking care of people in the community, then not only their health will go down, our health will go down and that will affect the entire nation."

**Natasha Balashova, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**

"If the government does not help us to hire more nurses or hire more help, it's going to be a collapse of the system. We've been hiring more and more but really nobody wants to come. If the government doesn't fund us, I don't know if they'll ever come and ever work in our institution. We're short to begin with, it's going to be shorter."

**Rowena Abersamia, nurse,  
SUNY Stony Brook**



# DOT Region 11 observes Black History Month; honors PEF members

By KATE MOSTACCIO

The observation of Black History Month dates back to 1915, when Carter G. Woodson, now known as the “Father of Black History,” created an organization called the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. In 1926, Woodson initiated the first “Negro History Week” to celebrate and raise awareness of Black history and, in 1976, this week-long observance morphed into a month-long celebration and was renamed Black History Month.

To commemorate the month, the New York State Department of Transportation in Region 11 hosted a two-day program, “Black American Accomplishments in NYSDOT,” on Feb. 16 and 17.

PEF members volunteered for the Region 11 Black History Month Committee, including Babatunde Tugbobo, Samantha Dreher, Brad Shilling, Juan Viera, Leoncio Romero and Geoffrey Rick.

Region 11 also honored PEF members Judith Peter and Tugbobo as black leaders in the Region.

Tugbobo, the regional planning and program manager for DOT Region 11, received his Doctor of Philosophy in Urban and Regional Planning – Transportation Planning from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Durban, South Africa. He also holds a Master of Science in Transportation Studies and two postgraduate diplomas.

Tugbobo joined DOT in Region 2’s traffic unit in 2008 as a transportation analyst. He transitioned to Region 11 in 2009. Prior to the DOT, he worked as a job opportunity specialist for the New York City Human Resources Administration and held various positions at urban planning private consulting firms in Nigeria.

Judith Peter began her DOT career 25 years ago, working the last seven years in the Joint Transportation Management Center where, under her direction, the center works closely



Contributed photo: The New York State Department of Transportation’s Region 11 recognized PEF members Babatunde Tugbobo and Judith Peter, second from left and third from left, as black leaders in the Region.

with the New York Police Department and the New York City DOT requesting traffic enforcement agents, managing the HELP program, reporting emergencies and coordinating “make-it-safe” repairs.

She serves as the regional emergency manager and has been heavily involved in COVID-19 response. Peter coordinates college recruiting efforts in Regions 10 and 11, manages the mentor/mentee program for Region 11, heads the planning committee for the next Bring Your Future to Work Day and participates in numerous regional committees.

She holds a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from the Pratt Institute and a master’s degree in transportation engineering from City College of New York.

Quoting Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, the committee stated: “We must never forget that Black History is American History. The achievements of African Americans have contributed to our nation’s greatness.”



## Latest news you need to know

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### **Put in to use your carried over vacation accruals**

Eligible members impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and unable to use vacation accruals have until December 31, 2022, to use carried over vacation that would have been forfeited on April 1, 2020 and April 1, 2021.

Carried-over accruals from April 2020, April 2021 and April 2022 will have to be used by December 31, 2022, to avoid forfeiture. No one should have had carried-over accruals forfeited on or after January 1, 2022.

The vacation accrual cap of 40 days was increased to 50 days for one-year effective April 1, 2022 and reverts to 40 days on April 1, 2023.

Vacation credits earned on or after April 1, 2022, are not impacted by these extensions or the December 31, 2022, deadline.

If you are unsure about your balance of carried over accruals, you should request that information from your agency. If you have any questions, contact your PEF Field Representative.

[Read the full memo on accruals here.](#)

### **Apply for reimbursement for OTC COVID test kits**

You can request reimbursement for U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized over-the-counter at-home COVID-19 tests that may be covered under your medical plan purchased on or after January 15, 2022.

[Use the form here to request reimbursement.](#)





## Sign up **TODAY** for the eCommunicator

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



# Keeping OPWDD running takes staff and commitment to clients

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Members working at the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities provide a host of services to New York's most vulnerable population. During the October 2021 PEF Convention in Niagara Falls, members sat down with PEF to discuss how the pandemic and short staffing impact their jobs, why they do what they do, and what their jobs mean to the communities where they live and work.

## How does COVID and short staffing impact your work?

"Prior to the pandemic, my job encompassed overseeing health care for individuals with developmental disabilities in the community. During COVID, it was very difficult to have that connection with the individual and monitor them. A lot of the health care needs of these individuals were compromised. "COVID was extremely bad in my area. We lost several individuals and several staff. Not to mention, the saddest part for me, watching a young 20-something staff member who is never going to be able to work again because they can't live without oxygen or other treatment. A friend who is a nurse brought it home to her family and her husband died. A few months later, her son died. She never got sick. She has that guilt and it's a guilt that as a nurse we carry all over because we try to do everything we can, but people contracted it."

**Carolyn Cole, community health nurse, OPWDD**

"During the pandemic, we did see that rather than seeing some of the recipients of services in person, we either speak with advocates over the phone or their families by phone. It changed the way we do things because many of the programs they benefit from have changed to virtual or something similar. When folks are used to a certain routine and that routine is disrupted, it does have an impact on the individual."

**Louisa Scott Cooper, DD specialist, OPWDD**

"I'm a physical therapist and part of what I do is oversee the adaptive equipment department, which is a very small

department that helps modify wheelchairs, beds, sets up alarms, allows the patients that we serve to have as much independence as possible. To have as much safety as possible. Folks that we serve in the developmental centers and group homes, the whole idea behind our services is to provide as much inclusion, as much normalcy, as possible so that folks can integrate into the world.

"As a clinician, in the old days, the patients would come to me. Short staffing makes it really difficult for patients to be able to come to me, so instead I travel to all of their homes. I'm more of a home care therapist, which is great, I can see the environment they live in, assess and adapt to their needs within their living environment. But that extra component of travel stretched the day out much longer than it should be. I can't see as many patients in a true eight-hour day. Our clinicians are professionals that make sure they get their services at the end of the day in any way that is possible. We go above and beyond to do the work of the people so that they can receive the services that make them healthy."

**Scott Dobe, physical therapist, OPWDD**

"We are a secure facility for individuals who are both developmentally disabled and have a psychiatric diagnosis. Individuals that live with us are there most often under court order because they are a danger to themselves or society or they just need that intensive treatment so they can go back into society and be successful. We are understaffed at the moment. We're a department of four and we have three social workers, so we have 16 to 17 individuals apiece.

Services outside in the community are very scarce and very difficult to come by, especially the agencies that are voluntary. They don't want to take our individuals because of their past behaviors, and we really have to sell them on how well they've done. It's difficult. We can't discharge them until we have a concrete plan in place for them with a place to live and programming and the wait is so long because with the pandemic and the change in staffing and other agencies



being short staffed, sometimes they just stay longer.”  
Suzanne Thomas, social worker assistant, OPWDD

## What does your work mean to the community?

“As a parent of a developmentally disabled child, I also travel in disability advocacy realms and in those areas a lot of what I hear from other parents, and myself too, is: are these services going to be around for our children? If you don’t have people willing to take those jobs, certainly you can’t provide those services. My one friend and I have autistic children who are teenagers and we both half-jokingly say we can never die. We have to be here forever to take care of them, because who’s going to be around to do it? Realistically, that is something you worry about.”

**Donna Karcz,**  
**habitation**  
**specialist, OPWDD**

“Staffing issues existed long before COVID. They are closing homes. They are calling it temporary suspension, but that means nothing to someone who doesn’t understand our system. In a group home with 10 people, if they temporarily suspend services, everyone who lives there has to live somewhere else. They may have lived in that home for 28 years and are moved to somewhere they have never been. We are disrupting peoples’ lives. This is beyond a problem; this is now a crisis.”

**Gregory Salameda, psychologist, OPWDD**

“We are so short-staffed. That means there are fewer beds, permanent and residential for those families waiting for services. We have families waiting many years for services. We have lost many 24-hour nursing group homes because of our inability to retain LPNs and RNs. These people are going into the nursing homes or hospitals. We’re losing services. We used to be the Cadillac of services, New York State. We are barely keeping up.

“Most of my people don’t have the ability to take care of daily needs, to brush their teeth without assistance, to manage medicine without assistance. Family members leave jobs because there is no one to take care of them. A lot of talented people can’t work because they don’t have anyone to take care of their children.”

**Leisa Abraham, psychologist, OPWDD**

“Younger children who are being homeschooled with disabilities, they don’t have the staff to come and help them with afterschool work, or now that their day is not as occupied as it once was and they are spending their entire day at home, workers are not able to go into the home to assist those with services.

**Louisa Scott Cooper, DD specialist, OPWDD**

## Why do you do it?

“I think most of us that work in this field, you do it for the intrinsic value of working with these people. There is a certain amount of joy that you get. In a lot of ways, it’s like working with young children. I think about what I’m going to do with people every day. We play games, gross motor activities or

fine motor. Sometimes they just laugh at me because they think I’m kooky.”

**Donna Karcz,**  
**habitation specialist,**  
**OPWDD**

“We take a lot of pride in what we do. The people I work with and people in my agency, we take pride in serving.

The legislature and the agency need to step

forward and say these people are a priority and it is not OK to play chess with their lives.”

**Gregory Salameda, psychologist, OPWDD**

“My entire family has always been in some type of service. I did want to teach, however, I realized that people with developmental disabilities were having a harder time in schools, and it went beyond just teaching in the classroom. There was a reason why little Johnny came to school always upset, it wasn’t because he was in school, it was because there was something wrong at home, or something happened on the way to school. Maybe he was being bullied because of his disability, maybe on the school bus, somebody was making fun of him.”

**Louisa Scott Cooper, DD specialist, OPWDD**





# PEF member oversees DEC youth summer camps program

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Safety, fun, learning.

That's the unofficial motto of the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) summer environmental education camps — Camp Colby, Camp DeBruce, Camp Rushford and Camp Pack Forest.

"During each weeklong program, we offer environmental and conservation education programs in a group dynamic," said PEF member Tom Shimalla, camp administrator, who works in the DEC's Bureau of Environmental Education. "The overall theme is people and kids working together, getting along, and having a safe place to do activities. We encourage interaction, communication, and cooperation.

"Then we get into the principles of ecology for a basic understanding," he said. "Other activities will then incorporate those principles. Kids learn about freshwater communities, field communities, forest communities. And at the end of the week, we look at the human community and our role in the environment."

Shimalla, an environmental educator 3, has been with DEC for 14 years. His current role puts him in charge of the DEC summer camp program.

"I oversee every aspect of the camps program," he said. "We also have two environmental education assistants who devote a majority of their time to supporting the camps program."

## Changes to the camp program in 2020 and 2021

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DEC was unable to operate its residential summer camps program in 2020 and 2021.

"After careful consideration, it was determined that there were too many uncertainties beyond anyone's control to ensure camps could open and operate safely," Shimalla said. "DEC hired nine exceptional former DEC summer camps staff to develop outdoor recreation and natural history themed programs.

"We were able to partner with organizations in a non-traditional way this past summer," he said. "While we missed the campers being on site, staff were able to deliver programming to 550 participants across New York. All programs were offered at no cost to participants, and most were open to the public."

## Celebrating 75 years of fostering a love for the natural world

The 2022 season will not only see the reopening of the residential programs but will also mark the 75th anniversary of the summer camp program. Each camp will host special programming throughout the season to celebrate. Campers and alumni alike will be invited back to camp for these days.





*Image via NYS DEC Summer Camps facebook page – @NYSDECsummercamps*

“Though residential camp did not run for the past two seasons, our goal this summer is to bridge the gap and ensure a robust reopening in 2022, the camps 75th anniversary season,” Shimalla said. “We have been planning for the 75th anniversary for some time now. It seems like a perfect fit to reopen and celebrate the long history of the program all in one summer.”

### **Managing summer camps more than just camp weeks**

The job has many facets beyond the 10 weeks of camp programming in the summer.

“It’s pretty much a 12-month operation,” Shimalla said. “In the fall, after the camps are over, we evaluate the summer. We look at the staff evaluations and comments from campers. We crunch a lot of numbers in terms of participation in different programs.”

Camp weeks offer the opportunity for campers to participate in hunter, bowhunter, and trapper education classes. Campers also participate in environmental programs, lessons, and traditional summer camp activities like tie-dying and group initiative activities.

“We try to keep numbers on each of our different programs so we can report back to the different units and let them know how their programs are being participated in at the summer camps,” he said.

Preparations for the coming year also begin soon after the kids return home.

“We begin advertising for seasonal camp staff,” Shimalla said. “We need 60 staff and 52 camp volunteers. Volunteers are campers’ ages, but they come back based on recommendations from directors and camp staff to help in the kitchen, serve food and participate in the programs. We have four volunteers at each camp, per week.”

Shimalla said the volunteers are dedicated to the principles taught at camp. “They are really interested in the program and we are looking for them to become camp aides and maybe even camp counselors in the future,” he said.

DEC staff helps train the new hires.

“I reach out to other staff for support in hiring, training and operating the camps program,” Shimalla said. “Our regional offices, environmental centers and administration units at 625 Broadway (in Albany) provide support personnel to train camp staff.”

Each year, Shimalla also oversees the health and safety plan for each camp.

“We come under the jurisdiction of the state Department of Health, so we need to develop a health and safety plan,” he said. The 300-400-page document covers everything from infrastructure to staff to health directors. “It’s everything we plan to do and implement for the coming summer.”

Infrastructure upgrades also fall under Shimalla’s oversight. “I collaborate with my coworkers in the Division of Operations to improve the facilities and to maintain them,” he said. “For example, Camp Colby will be wrapping up a dining hall renovation in time for this coming summer. My predecessor was instrumental in getting facility upgrades at the camps. In the last few years, we’ve added new pavilions at Camp DeBruce, Camp Colby and Pack Forest.

“We like to keep things outdoors,” he said of the reason behind building the pavilions. “In all but Camp Rushford, the facilities weren’t originally designed for summer camps so having an outdoor space that’s covered really comes in handy.”

In 2016, the DEC completed construction of its last new camp health center. “We’re pleased and fortunate to have these facilities,” Shimalla said. “The previous facilities weren’t in compliance with changing regulations, so we needed to have these improvements.”

Shimalla and fellow DEC staff also set up food service for the camps, hiring cooks and setting up food service accounts based on Office of General Services requirements. They also enter janitorial contracts for each location.

In 2012, DEC streamlined the registration process for campers by introducing an online registration and management system.

“We coordinate with the vendor to set up for registration day,” Shimalla said. “We can have 1,300 kids each summer at the camps.” DEC now opens registration on Sundays, which is more convenient for parents but also means spaces fill even faster.

## Quality education programming, summer activities

Full weeks are a testament to the value of DEC's summer programs.

"Campers come three different ways," Shimalla said.

"Sponsors, like fish and rod clubs, hunting clubs, organizations, libraries; direct by their parents registering; and camperships. The Diversity Campership Program is for kids who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to go to camp. We work with individual children or groups in the Capital District, Buffalo, New York City and organizations scattered throughout New York."

The Campership Program introduces youth, who wouldn't traditionally have the opportunity, to nature and the outdoors before they attend their DEC camp. "It helps them get ready for camp week," Shimalla said. The Capital District Campership Diversity Program was inspired and coordinated by "Brother Yusuf," Yusuf Burgess, until his death, Shimalla said.

"He was big in the environmental field and the Children and Nature Network," Shimalla said.

Planning for the programming at each camp is labor intensive. "We like environmental conservation officers and forest rangers to come, when they are available," Shimalla said. "Sometimes we have biologists or other Fish and Wildlife staff give programs. We have connections with a number of colleges and universities around the state who come in and present programs."

Kids can also participate in traditional summer camp activities, such as canoeing, kayaking, hiking, swimming, arts and crafts, field journaling and more. They can also opt for activities like archery, fishing, hunter education and outdoor skill development.

At Pack Forest, DEC offers a special program for its older campers, aged 14 to 17.

"We have Outdoor Adventure Week at Pack Forest," Shimalla said. "It's a little bit above what we normally do. Permanent DEC staff provide more in-depth programming and the overnight camping trips are more intense."

Overnights are often a camper's most memorable summer experience.

"Every week the kids get to go on an overnight," Shimalla said. "When they are doing their closing campfire, and when they are asked their favorite part of camp, most kids say, 'The overnights.'"

Giving the kids a fun, educational and memorable summer experience is rewarding.

"It's why we do what we do," Shimalla said.

Register opens April 10 and fills up fast. [Click here for the registration portal.](#)

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Vine City resident Dorothy Bolden, Atlanta, June 16, 1988 - Photo by Dwight Ross, Jr., Courtesy Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archive (AJCP330-041ac)

# Black women led the way in organizing labor

By KATE MOSTACCIO

Domestic workers organized some of the earliest labor unions, and Black women who knew the importance of workers' rights stepped up to lead them. With Black History Month recognized in February and Women's History Month coming in March, it's fitting to look back on some of the notable Black women in the labor and civil rights movements.

Newly emancipated Black women started the first union in Mississippi history in 1866, sending a resolution to the mayor of Jackson detailing their plans to charge a "uniform rate" for laundry work. A few decades later, Black women in Atlanta followed in their footsteps, but were forced to take it even further with a strike.

At the start of the 1880s, 98 percent of Atlanta's working Black women were employed as household workers, often paid low wages and putting in long hours.

"Domestic workers included the maids, child nurses, cooks, laundresses, and they engaged in the most intimate labor, the least desirable work conducted in the homes of white families especially in the South after emancipation and Black women overwhelmingly dominated these positions," said Dr. Tera Hunter, author of "To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War," during a

question and answer with [the Zinn Education Project](#). "They were paid substandard wages, were expected to work very long hours, to endure insults and even sometimes physical assaults to keep their jobs."

Laundry work performed by "laundresses" afforded women some flexibility as they did the wash in their own homes and communities – but more importantly, it gave them solidarity that would fuel a coming labor movement.

In the summer of 1881, a group of 20 laundresses, fed up with unfair wages and lack of respect, formed a trade organization, the Washing Society, to fight for higher pay, respect, and autonomy over their work. Support grew quickly, with the 20 members climbing to 3,000 in only three weeks of door-to-door organizing.

The striking workers faced arrests, fines and hostile visits from Atlanta officials, who employed scare tactics to try and defeat the strike.

"When the strike broke out in July, the women faced a lot of opposition and ridicule," Hunter said in the video. "From employers, from city officials, from businessmen and the most vocal was the local newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution. But

opponents who laughed initially were soon forced to admit that the nickname they gave these women, the Washing Amazons, actually proved to be more symbolic than derisive in terms of showing their effectiveness.

"What's remarkable is that this was a group of marginalized workers, mostly illiterate, women, and yet they organized the largest strike in the city's history," Hunter said. The laundresses' strength and determination in the face of opposition inspired other Black workers in the city to demand higher wages and better conditions. "The washerwomen are an important reminder of the role that working class women have played in grassroots politics in the South and elsewhere."

### Women leaders in union organizing

As Black women dominated the ranks of domestic workers, it's no surprise that they also led the charge for fair wages and respect among the workforces.

**Dorothy Lee Bolden** started off as a civil rights activist, but in 1968, she helped organize the National Domestic Workers Union of America. While it wasn't a formal union, it brought together women in the industries and at its height served more than 10,000 members.



"Bolden's leap from bus passenger to leader of a powerful labor organization was not far-fetched to those who knew her," according to her obituary in *The New York Times*, published as part of a series of obituaries for Black men and women who had been overlooked at the time of their deaths. "She had already taken part in the civil rights movement, marching in protests alongside figures like the late Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), who led the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. 'She spoke up, and she spoke out, and when she saw something that wasn't fair, or just, or right, she would say something,' [Lewis] said in a telephone interview."

Bolden was proud of her job as a domestic worker. In 1983, she told *The Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* that "[a] domestic worker is a counselor, a doctor, a nurse. She cares about the family she works for as she cares about her own."

### Her advice for organizing?

"You have to teach each maid how to negotiate," she said in "Household Workers Unite." "And this is the most important thing — communication. I would tell them it was up to them to communicate."

In the 1920s, **Rosina Corrothers Tucker** helped organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) with her second husband, Berthea J. Tucker, a Pullman porter. The trade union became the first Black labor union recognized by the AFL-CIO.



Using the skills she gained as an advocate for BSCP and as a founding member of the International Ladies' Auxiliary Order, she worked tirelessly to organize laundry workers, domestic workers, and hotel and restaurant workers, jobs which were predominantly held by Black women. She was also a leader in the fight to integrate public spaces in Washington, D.C., and advocated for the rights of children and the elderly.

"Tucker's contributions to labor and civil rights extended well beyond the BSCP," according to the National Parks Service website. "In the early 1940s, she played an important role in the March on Washington movement, which challenged segregation in the armed forces and defense industry. She also organized locally in Washington, D.C., both to boycott businesses that refused to hire Black employees and to create unions for women working in the laundry and domestic service industries."

In 1963, Tucker helped organize the March on Washington, the largest gathering for civil rights of its time with an estimated 250,000 people descending on Washington by plane, train, car and bus from across the United States.

The march was the brainchild of A. Philip Randolph, founder of the BSCP, but is perhaps most well-known for Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speech.





# 11 vacant seats filled on PEF Executive Board

By SHERRY HALBROOK

PEF's first quarterly special elections of 2022 filled 11 vacant seats on the union's Executive Board. The candidates for these seats are automatically seated as the only certified candidates. They will serve the remainder of three-year terms ending July 31, 2024. No balloting was required.

Second quarter petitioning will begin in April to fill 14 remaining board vacancies, plus at least three new vacancies that have occurred so far.

Seated following the first-quarter petitioning are:

- Abdallahi Diop, **Seat 80**, which represents certain members at the State University of New York (SUNY)
- Rachel Amodio-Kopp, **Seat 85**, which represents certain other members at SUNY
- Teresa Moore, **Seat 95**, which represents certain other members at SUNY
- Sam Win, **Seat 174**, which represents certain members at the state Office of Information Technology Services (ITS)
- Erika Baker, **Seat 185**, which represents certain members at the state Health Department (DOH)
- Patricia O'Toole, **Seat 200**, which represents certain other members at the DOH
- Ralph Reale, **Seat 255**, which represents certain members at the state Department of Law
- Frederick Bulmer, **Seat 310**, which represents certain members at the state Office of Mental Health
- David Takor, **Seat 435**, which represents certain members at the state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)
- Gustavo Santos, **Seat 490**, which represents certain members at the state Transportation Department
- Girma Agonafer, **Seat 560**, which represents certain members at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center

Current remaining vacancies plus three new vacancies include:

- **Seat 1**, State Department of Agriculture and Markets
- **Seat 15**, Department of Civil Service
- **Seat 81**, SUNY
- **Seat 90**, Office of Higher Educational Services
- **Seat 97**, SUNY
- **Seat 101**, ITS
- **Seat 161**, State Executive Department
- **Seat 165**, State Executive Department
- **Seat 172**, ITS
- **Seat 173**, ITS
- **Seat 207**, State Insurance Fund
- **Seat 210**, State Insurance Fund
- **Seat 395**, OPWDD
- **Seat 425**, state Department of Public Service
- **Seat 440**, OCFS
- **Seat 545**, political subdivisions; and
- **Seat 550**, Roswell Park



# 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.

- **Diane Aleksandrowicz** is a nurse 2 at Rochester Psychiatric Center. Call 585-241-1900;
- **Edward Carey** is a supervising computer operator at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany. Call 518-457-4272;
- **Matthew Cassidy** is a senior librarian at Woodbourne Correctional Facility in Woodbourne. Call 845-434-7730;
- Deena Christian is an offender rehabilitation coordinator at Greene Correctional Facility in West Coxsackie. Call 518-731-2741;
- **Carol Christiansen** is a teaching and research center nurse 2 at Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse. Call 315-464-4943;
- **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;
- **Eddie Lorenzo** is a public health field services representative trainee 1 in Central Islip. Call 518-457-4272;
- **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; and
- **Karen Tully** is a senior attorney at the NYS Department of State in Albany. Call 518-474-2752.

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.





# Letters to the Editor

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### Should she get 10-year longevity award?

To the Editor: I have a general question regarding the longevity retro payouts.

I'm an R.N. who worked 45 years at and retired from the Community Campus on July 16, 2021 after 10 years with the state.

It was my understanding from the memo that I should get both the five-year and 10-year awards. Is that correct? I only received a check for the five-year award amount for 2019, 2020 and 2021.

KATHI SCARSON  
Syracuse

*Editor's Note: To be eligible for a five, 10 or 15-year longevity award, the employee must have been at the top of their salary grade for five, 10 or 15 years, respectively. It is based on years at the top of your pay grade, not total years of service.*

*If the writer still believes she was eligible for the 10-year longevity for 2019, 2020 or 2021, she should contact her former PEF Field office.*

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### Wants info on scholarships

To the Editor: I would like to inquire about resources on scholarships that my daughter could apply for. Thank you for your help.

CAMILE WILSON  
Brooklyn

**Editor's Note:** The PEF website has information on scholarships here: <https://www.pef.org/about/scholarships/>. A story in the December 2021-January 2022 combined issue of The Communicator provided information on union scholarships. It is available on page 14 of that issue here: <https://communicator.pef.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/12/PEF-Communicator-Dec2021.pdf>. You also should check with your PEF division and PEF region to see if they offer scholarships.



# Retirees in Action: Do you know what to do if your partner dies?

I hope you all had a great holiday season and wonderful New Year. February is a great month to reset and review life choices, especially end-of-life decisions and estate planning.

Our PEF Retirees office has prepared a very useful document to guide you with this dreaded but important planning. Now is a good time to take inventory of our lives. 2021 was a very challenging year, but despite the challenges we need to stay informed, engaged and active.

September through January is when NYSHIP mailed you important information on your health insurance coverage. These books are CALLED Evidence of Coverage (Jan 1, 2022 – Dec 31, 2022) Annual Notice of change for 2022. It's important to read them and be familiar with your coverage and choices.

For example, in Health Insurance Choices 2022 it states on page 3 under Non-NYSHIP Plans, "Please keep in mind that Medicare allows enrollment in only one Medicare product at a time."

Therefore, enrolling in a Medicare Advantage Plan, a Medicare Part D plan or another Medicare product (including those which you or your covered dependents may be enrolled in through another employer) in addition to your NYSHIP coverage, will result in cancellation of your NYSHIP coverage.

If you cancel your NYSHIP coverage to join a Non-NYSHIP Medicare Advantage Plan, the state no longer reimburses you for your Medicare-eligible dependence for the part B premium. If you wish to re-enroll in NYSHIP, there may be a three-month waiting period.

If you die while you're not enrolled in a NYSHIP plan, your dependents will not be eligible for dependent survivor coverage. If you have questions, you can call NYSHIP Benefits Division at 518-457-5754 or 1-800-833-4344.

I suggest you read this whole section thoroughly! It is important that we know our benefits in order to make informed choices. It is also important to know when and if we should get the COVID-19 vaccine.

### What to Do When a Loved One Dies

**Find the will** and identify the executor. Your loved one's survivors need to know where any money, property, or belongings will go. Ideally, you spoke with your relative before he or she died and were told where their will was stored and who the executor is.

**Secure certified copies of death certificates.** Get 10 copies. You're going to need death certificates to close bank and brokerage accounts, to file insurance claims, and to register the death with government agencies, among other things. The funeral home you're working with can get copies on your behalf, or you can order them from the vital statistics office in the state in which the person died.

**Make a list of bills.** Share the list of bills with the executor so that important expenses like a mortgage, taxes, and utilities are taken care of while the estate is settled.

**Cancel services no longer needed.** Services can include items such as cellphone, iTunes, Netflix, cable, internet, and more.

**Delete or memorialize social media accounts.** You can delete Facebook or Instagram accounts, but some survivors choose to turn them into a memorial for their loved one, instead. A memorialized Facebook profile stays up with the word "Remembering" in front of the deceased's name. Friends will be able to post on the timeline. Whether you choose to delete or memorialize, you'll need to contact the company (social media platform provider) with copies of your ID, as well as the death certificate of the deceased.

**Close email accounts.** To prevent identity theft and fraud, it's a good idea to shut down the deceased's email account. If the deceased set up a funeral plan or a will, he or she may have included log-in information so you can do this yourself. If not, you'll need copies of the death certificate to cancel an email account. The specifics vary by company/service provider, but most require a death certificate and verification that you are kin or the executor.

### Notify important companies/organizations of your loved one's death.

**Life insurance companies.** You'll need a death certificate and policy numbers to make claims on any policies the deceased had. If the deceased had a Group Term Life insurance policy with Sun Life, please contact the PEF Membership Benefits Program at (800) 342-4306, ext. 243, opt. 2.

**Banks & financial institutions.** If your loved one left a list of accounts and online passwords, it will be much easier to close or change accounts. If the person didn't, you'll need a copy of the death certificate.

**Financial advisers & stockbrokers.** Determine the beneficiary listed on accounts. Depending on the type of asset, the beneficiary may get access to the account or benefit simply by filling out appropriate forms and providing a copy of the death certificate (no executor needed).

**Credit agencies.** To prevent identity theft, send copies of the death certificate to the three major firms: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.

**Cancel driver's license.** This removes the deceased's name from the records of the Department of Motor Vehicles and prevents identity theft. Contact the local DMV for specific instructions. You'll need a copy of the death certificate.

**Close credit card accounts.** Contact customer service at each company and tell the representative that you're closing the account



on behalf of a deceased relative. You'll need to provide a copy of the death certificate to do this, too. Keep records of accounts you close and inform the executor of any outstanding balances on the cards.

### **NYS Retirement System – Office of the State Comptroller**

You can report the death of a member or retiree by using the online death report form. You can also report a death by phone or mail. Please note: You will need an original, certified death certificate before any death benefits can be processed or paid.

Online Form. Please complete all required fields on the Report a Death form and be sure to provide a phone number in case they need to call for additional information. You can upload a photocopy of the death certificate so NYSLRS can begin identifying any benefits that may be payable.

Call 866-805-0990 and press 3 and then 1. You will be asked for the member's NYSLRS ID, retirement, or registration number (or Social Security number if you don't have these account numbers), and the date of death. You may also be asked for the address and phone numbers of immediate family members who may be beneficiaries.

Mail. NYSLRS will need an original, certified death certificate before any death benefits can be processed or paid. Please mail a death certificate (please include your contact information) to: NYSLRS Attn: Survivor Services, 110 State St, Albany, NY 12244. Note. You may wish to send the death certificate by certified mail, return receipt requested.

You can contact NYSLRS online at: <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/retirement/contact-us?event=true>.

### **Survivor's Benefit Program**

A survivor's benefit may be payable on behalf of a deceased state employee under certain special circumstances. Ordinarily, no action by the designated beneficiary is necessary in connection with this benefit. This can be discussed with NYSLRS when you call to report the death and inquire about pension benefits.

### **New York State Department of Civil Service**

The New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP) offers protection. Whether you are eligible to continue coverage under NYSHIP, and what your premium will cost, will depend on the following circumstances:

If you lose eligibility or die, your enrolled dependents may continue their coverage as dependent survivors until they no longer meet the eligibility requirements as dependents. If they no longer meet these requirements, they may enroll for another 36 months through the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), a federal continuation of coverage law, or convert to a direct-pay contract.

Survivors of the deceased relative are covered by the same rules as active employees for changing health insurance plans.

If you and your dependents are not eligible for survivor coverage under the State Health Insurance Program, you may be eligible to continue coverage in NYSHIP for up to 36 months, under COBRA, or convert to direct-pay contracts.

### **Contact:**

Employee Benefits Division  
New York State Department of Civil Service, Albany, New York 12239  
Web site: [www.cs.ny.gov](http://www.cs.ny.gov)  
Telephone: (518) 457-5754 (Albany area) or 1-800-833-4344

### **The Social Security Administration**

If the deceased was receiving Social Security benefits, you need to stop the checks. Some family members may be eligible for death benefits from Social Security. Generally, funeral directors report deaths to the Social Security Administration, but, ultimately, it's the survivors' responsibility to tell the SSA.

Contact your local SSA office to do so. The agency will let Medicaid know that your loved one died. Payment of Social Security benefits is not automatic. If the deceased was covered by Social Security, you should inquire about survivors' benefits for widow/widower, minor or disabled children, and dependent parents. When filing a claim for benefits, a certified copy of the death certificate, birth certificates for the surviving spouse and minor or disabled children, as well as a marriage certificate, will be required and returned to you. A copy of the deceased's W-2 for the preceding two years will be necessary, as well as Social Security numbers for the deceased and for all applicants. The address of your nearest Social Security office is listed in the telephone directory under "Social Security Administration." You are encouraged by Social Security to use either their appointment or telephone claims system for your convenience.

**Please note:** The death of someone who was receiving or eligible for Social Security on his or her own work record triggers a one-time payment of \$255 (often called the "burial benefit" or "death benefit") to a surviving spouse who was living with the deceased or collecting Social Security benefits on the deceased's record. If there is no surviving spouse, the \$255 would go to any child who qualifies for benefits on the deceased's record.

### **Veterans' Benefits**

If the deceased was a veteran of military service, you should inquire about benefits for which you may be eligible as the survivor.

A brochure entitled, "Benefits for Veterans and Their Families" is available by writing to:

New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs  
5 Empire State Plaza, Suite 2836  
Albany, New York 12223-1551





**March 5, 2022**

PEF Region 7 representing PEF at the Legislative Breakfast this am, sponsored by the Northeast Central Labor Council in Plattsburgh, NY.



**March 4, 2022**

PEF Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky, Field Rep Marty Blair and PEF Organizer Jess Carpenter showed appreciation to the PEF Region 7 OMH Wellness Centers and MIT members with lunch and swag bags. Thanks to Massena Wellness, Ogdensburg Wellness, Gouverneur Wellness and Watertown Wellness Centers for the warm welcome!!



**February 25, 2022**

PEF E-Board Representatives and Region 12 Coordinator Nora Higgins at vaccine information table, providing members with answers and valuable information.



**February 22, 2022**

PEF Division 292 members boosting union morale in Red for Valentine's Day week! Thank you Council Leader Noemi Seabrook for sharing.



**February 19, 2022**

More masks for PEF members at Division 201 at OPWDD!



**February 18, 2022**

Members of PEF Division 244 at the Brooklyn DDSO sporting their "I Should be Earning Hazard Pay" masks!



**February 17, 2022**

PEF VP Randi Diantonio, Field Rep Ellen Coyne, Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham, and Council Leader Shelby Wisneski meeting with Division 201 OPWDD nurses, who are proudly wearing their hazard pay masks.



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