



A step in the right direction.

**Nurse title restructuring is a win
for all members!**

**The
Communicator** PEF

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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



Niagara Falls, here we come!

The October Communicator is coming to you just days before more than 500 delegates gather at the Niagara Falls Convention Center for the union's 44th Annual Convention. PEF is unique in the New York labor movement – holding a convention each year, per Article XVI of the PEF Constitution: "The Convention shall meet once annually between September 1st and November 30th at a time and place determined by the Executive Board..."

It will be my eighth as your president and I'm looking forward to reviewing the year's accomplishments and helping chair the plenary sessions as delegates set the agenda for the year to come. We have so much to be thankful for, and first on that list is an active, engaged membership that is committed to making sure PEF remains a powerful force.

[The lead story in this issue is something that has been decades in the making – Nurse Title Restructuring.](#)

It is a long-awaited major step toward pay equity for the State's hardworking nurses. I'd like to thank all of PEF's nurses who helped advocate on the issue and the PEF Civil Service Enforcement/Research department for their persistence. This was a long time coming and I truly believe it will make a difference in the recruitment and retention of nurses in New York. It also sets an important precedent. There are plenty of other PEF titles that need restructuring and we plan to push for change in those areas.

Speaking of change, negotiations for a successor contract will begin next month for members in the Professional, Scientific & Technical (PS&T) bargaining unit. Our Contract Team has been training for months and is analyzing all the data collected from the [Contract Survey](#).

October is also Breast Cancer Awareness month and in that spirit we have a [feature in this issue](#) about a nurse practitioner at Roswell Park who helps patients every day during the most frightening time in their lives.

Looking ahead, don't forget to vote on November 8! [You can review the list of PEF-endorsed candidates here](#) and we have some other useful information in this issue to help you find your polling place.

We'll be back with an update after Convention. Until then, stay healthy and safe.

In Unity,

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Wayne Spence
PEF President

State pay equity study validates PEF's long-time argument that nursing titles are undervalued

By KATE STICKLES

A series of pay increases and title restructuring for nurse positions in state agencies announced this week by Gov. Hochul and the Department of Civil Service are a step in the right direction when it comes to recruiting and retaining the talented nurses of PEF.

And it's a long time coming.

"PEF advocated for years on behalf of pay equity and title restructuring for nurses in our union," said President Wayne Spence. "We are pleased that Governor Hochul and the Department of Civil Service have taken steps to increase salary grades and reward these dedicated public servants. At a time when we've all seen the importance of public health services, New York must continue to do everything it can to attract and retain nurses."

In response to the Pay Equity Study in New York State and Local Government, [available here](#), the state upgraded select nursing titles, with the upgrades representing an average pay increase of 4.5 percent per title. Registered nurse titles will now be hired at the midpoint of the salary range and receive updated shift pay to include an increase of 7 percent of base pay for the evening shift (4 p.m. to 12 a.m.) and an increase of 10 percent of base pay for the night shift (12 to 8 a.m.), according to the [press release](#) from the governor's office.

Recruitment and retention difficulties, an aging workforce, and inadequate pay have decimated nursing ranks. The average age of a nurse is 52 and in 2020 nearly 70,000 nurses retired. The unprecedented challenges of the COVID pandemic led to 5 percent of the nursing workforce stepping away from the job.

Change has been a long time coming, says Nurse Coordinator Nora Higgins, who worked more than 30 years as a registered nurse at SUNY Stony Brook before joining PEF staff.

"Since I've been involved as an activist with PEF, we have heard about this dream called reallocation," she said. "Now that it's a reality, it's a jubilant time for our nurses to see our goals come to fruition."

PEF first submitted reallocation requests to Civil Service from 1979 to 1982 and the union has been involved in the process every step of the way. In 2019, PEF advocated for the legislature to conduct a pay equity study. That work has now paid off. This year saw substantial geo pay raises and now the restructuring and resulting pay increases.



Nurses on the job across PEF's ranks expressed thanks to the union for its advocacy.

New PEF member Kelly Burris, who joined state service as an RN at OPWDD's Finger Lakes DDSO in October, has already received an \$8,000 geographic pay raise and is grateful for the union's long-time advocacy and this recent win.

"I have been a nurse for almost 40 years," she said. "I'm very appreciative of everything that PEF has done, I'm so thankful. PEF really looks out for the nurses. I finally feel like I'm going to be paid what I deserve because I work hard every day. This is the best raise I've ever gotten in my years as a nurse."

Longtime OPWDD nurse Shannon Wagner has been watching the process since the beginning.



"It's taken over 30 years," she said. "I didn't expect to see it happen before I retired. It's been a long haul and I am so grateful to PEF and President Spence for their persistence and hard work to finally get this reclassification and pay parity for New York state nurses."

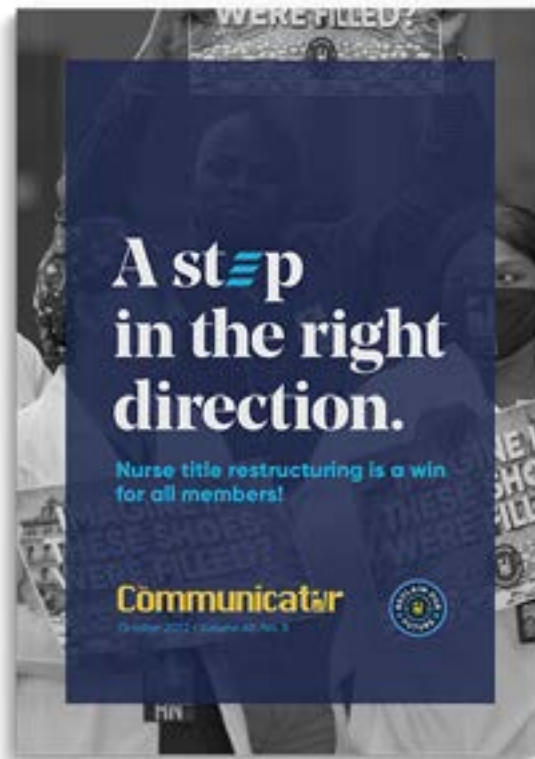
PEF's Civil Service Enforcement and Research Department analyzed the findings of the study and concluded that it uncovered substantial evidence that certain titles are undervalued. As a result, it seems reasonable to assume that the undervaluation has existed for several years. The department's analysis of the report found that PEF has more than 9,000 members whose wage rate is undervalued.

The PEF Article 44 Committee took a deep dive into registered nurse salaries at state facilities and agencies situated near private facilities and found large discrepancies between the two, with some downstate nurses making 30 percent less than their counterparts at neighboring private-sector facilities. (Read the story in the June 2021 Communicator [here](#).)

But the fight for pay equity across the state workforce is by no means over.

"These changes are a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done," Spence said. "A win for some of us can turn into a win for many. When PEF negotiated a [2.5 times temporary overtime rate extensions for nursing titles at the SUNY hospitals](#), we were able to use that as a jumping off point to expand that win to hundreds of other titles across multiple agencies. We will continue to vigorously advocate for the fair pay of all our members across all agencies. All PEF members deserve to be paid fairly, treated appropriately, and protected on the job."

If you have questions about how these changes may impact you, [PEF Field Services has put together this FAQ](#) for impacted titles. Contact your field representative for any questions not covered by the document.



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For Immediate Release: 10/14/2022

GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

Governor Hochul Announces Pay Increases for Nurse Positions to Improve Statewide Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Pay Increases Benefit More than 6,500 State Employees Across 15 State Agencies Part of Governor's Overall Commitment to Expand Healthcare Workforce

Governor Kathy Hochul today announced a series of pay increases for nurse positions within New York State agencies to help improve recruitment and retention among the state's healthcare workforce. The increases, which account for the rising complexity of nursing tasks and high credential requirements for nurses, will bring the starting salary of registered nurses working the day shift to nearly \$90,000 upstate and \$108,000 downstate when coupled with pay differentials. The pay increases will benefit approximately 6,500 New York State employees located across 15 state agencies.

"After more than two years on the frontlines in the battle against COVID-19, New York nurses deserve more than our gratitude - they deserve fair and competitive pay," Governor Hochul said. "These wage increases reflect our state's commitment to supporting our healthcare workers and will help us retain and recruit the next generation of nurses to keep New Yorkers safe."

New York State upgraded select nursing titles, with the upgrades representing an average pay increase of 4.5 percent per title. Registered Nurse titles will also now be hired at the midpoint of the salary range. In addition, registered nurse titles will receive an updated shift pay to include an increase of 7 percent of base pay for the evening shift (4:00pm to 12:00am) and an increase of 10 percent of base pay for the night shift (12:00am to 8:00 am).

These pay increases are in addition to increased geographic pay differentials for registered and licensed practical nurse titles enacted earlier this year. In July, registered nurse positions located in Mid-Hudson and downstate locations received a \$35,000 geographic pay differential, an increase of 94 percent from the previous \$18,000 differential. Registered nurse positions located in the rest of the state also received a \$20,000 geographic pay differential, an increase of 67

percent from the previous \$12,000 pay differential. In May, licensed practical nurse positions located in Mid-Hudson and downstate locations received a \$13,000 geographic pay differential, an increase of 550 percent from the previous \$2,000 differential and positions located in the rest of the state received a \$4,000 geographic pay differential, an increase of 100 percent from the previous \$2,000 differential.

The salary increase is expected to have the greatest impact at the following agencies, which currently have the largest number of eligible positions:

- State University of New York - 3,381 employees
- Office of Mental Health - 1,663 employees
- Office for People with Developmental Disabilities - 674 employees
- Department of Corrections and Community Supervision - 518 employees
- Department of Health - 371 employees
- Office of Addiction Services and Supports - 120 employees

New York State Department of Civil Service Commissioner Timothy Hognes said, "New York State employs thousands of nurses, who provide critical services across our state agencies to protect the health and wellbeing of New Yorkers. By offering our nurses with these well-deserved pay increases, our partner agencies will be better positioned to retain these talented and dedicated employees. Under the leadership of Governor Hochul, the Department of Civil Service is working hard to implement changes to best support and retain our current public workforce and to ensure our compensation is competitive to attract the next generation of talent to public service careers."



Public Employees Federation President Wayne Spence said, “PEF advocated for years on behalf of pay equity and title restructuring for nurses in our union. We are pleased that Governor Hochul and the Department of Civil Service have taken steps to increase salary grades and reward these dedicated public servants. At a time when we’ve all seen the importance of public health services, New York must continue to do everything it can to attract and retain nurses.”

These pay increases are part of Governor Hochul’s historic commitment and investments to restore the healthcare workforce and build the healthcare system of tomorrow. As part of the enacted FY 2023 Budget, Governor Hochul is investing more than \$10 billion in healthcare, including more than \$4 billion to support wages and bonuses for healthcare workers. This includes a \$1.2 billion investment for healthcare and mental hygiene worker retention bonuses, with up to \$3,000 bonuses going to full-time workers who remain in their positions for one year, and pro-rated bonuses for those working fewer hours.

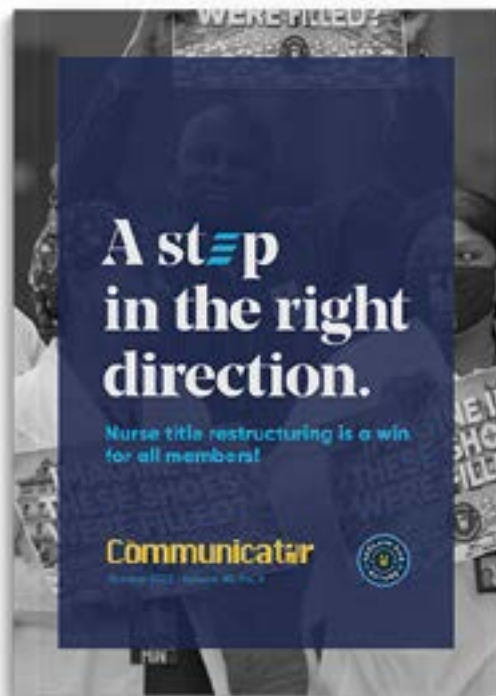
New York State fosters an environment that encourages and supports the professional growth and career opportunities for nurses and employs thousands of Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, and Licensed Practical Nurses in agencies located across the State.

Nurses employed in State government receive:

- Comprehensive benefit package, including retirement benefits
- A wide range of career mobility options
- A broad selection of education, professional development, and training opportunities
- Tuition reimbursement and tuition assistance

For more information on public service nursing careers, [visit Nursing Careers in State Government](#).

To learn more about working for the State of New York and how to take the next step in pursuing a rewarding career in public service, please [visit the Department of Civil Service website](#) and follow the Department of Civil Service on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).



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PEF set to commence Contract negotiations in November

By KATE STICKLES

Ahead of the first meeting with the state in November, PEF's contract negotiation team surveyed thousands of members to gain insight into your priorities, including what economic benefits to prioritize and to rank things like longevity pay, bonuses and improving the dental benefit.

The Contract Team will go into the first meeting knowing what's most important to members. The contract is our chance to codify things like telecommuting, seniority rights and alternative work schedules.

Don't miss the November issue of the Communicator, where we will report on the contract fight and introduce you to the members of your Contract Team.

You can still get in your opinion until 5 p.m. today (Oct. 21). It takes about 5 minutes and all you need to do is enter your personal email to begin.

[Click here to complete the survey.](#)





PEF special elections underway to fill mid-term vacancies on E. Board, Reg. 12

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Five vacant seats on the PEF Executive Board have been filled. These were mid-term vacancies and PEF members filling them will serve the remainder of the unexpired terms that end July 31, 2024.

Keith Browne fills Seat 105 that represents certain members at the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Robert Doran fills Seat 202 that represents members at the state Office of the Medicaid Inspector General. Kevin Jones fills Seat 245 at the state Labor Department. Indermattie Balkaran fills Seat 375 that represents certain members at the state Office of Mental Health. And Kyle Jacobson fills Seat 485 representing certain members at the state Department of Taxation and Finance. Four of these candidates were automatically seated because they were the only certified candidates for those positions during the Third Quarter Special Elections. Two candidates were certified for Seat 245 representing certain members at the state Labor Department and Jones won the election that was held.

No candidates were certified for 12 additional vacant board seats and nominees are now sought for them in the Fourth Quarter Special Election, along with new board vacancies and the now vacant post of PEF Region 12 coordinator. Region 12 includes both Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island.

PEF President Wayne Spence urged PEF members who are eligible to run for the vacant seats to give it serious consideration. "We are always stronger together. We need voices representing every part of our membership debating our issues, and voting on our actions and policies. Vacant board seats mean that all of those members represented by that seat are going without their rightful chance to participate fully in setting our goals and acting on them. That's unfair to them and we all suffer for it. So, please, consider carefully in deciding if you would like to step forward and run to fill a vacant seat."

Nominating petitions for the Fourth Quarter elections became available October 11 and must be returned to and received by the Special Elections Committee by 5 p.m. November 2. If more than one candidate is certified by the committee for any vacant seat ballots will be sent to that constituency November 23 and must be returned to AAA by December 15 for counting the next day.

At this time, the following vacancies will be subject to the Fourth Quarter election process:

Region 12 Coordinator;
Seat 1, Agriculture and Markets;
Seat 15, Civil Service;
Seat 40, Corrections and Community Supervision;
Seat 90, Higher Education Services Corporation;
Seat 101, SUNY Stonybrook;
Seat 104, SUNY Stonybrook;
Seat 172, Information Technology;
Seat 173, Information Technology;
Seat 220, Workers Compensation
Seat 395, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities;
Seat 425, Public Service;
Seat 520, Transportation; and
Seat 545, Political subdivisions of NYS.

[Click here for petitions and additional election information.](#)

PEF regions prepping delegates for convention

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

PEF regions throughout the state are holding meetings with their convention delegates to prepare for the event that begins October 23 in Niagara Falls.

Regional Coordinator Danielle Bridger held its annual delegate dinner Tuesday night, October 11, at the Italian American Community Center in Albany. Regional Coordinator Danielle Bridger started by telling the 87 delegates in attendance, "This is a training meeting," and that training would be the main focus rather than discussing at length every one of the twelve resolutions that members have submitted for debate and action at the convention. The resolutions address topics including civil service, hostile work environments, mid-term changes to Executive Board constituencies, single-payer health insurance and assignment of members to divisions.

PEF Finance Director Ray Brown provided training on how the delegates should use their convention stipends for meals, how to submit claims for reimbursement of receipted expenses at convention and mileage if they drive to convention.

Membership Benefits Program Administrator Stephanie McLean-Beathley told the delegates about some of the special events and efforts that will be featured at convention, such as raising funds and awareness for breast cancer and for domestic violence. She also said that MBP and PEF leaders will reach out to the community in nearby



At a dinner meeting October 11 in Albany, Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger holds up a folder with the event's agenda and other materials for the region's delegates to the upcoming 2023 PEF Convention.

Buffalo affected by the tragic mass shooting that took place last spring at a local supermarket.

The delegates also received information and training regarding convention procedures.



Left photo: Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stansky, third from the right, with delegates from PEF Region 7 before their annual pre-Convention dinner on Oct. 14, 2022.
Right photo: Region 10 Coordinator Radhakrishna Mohan, standing, meets with Convention delegates from Region 10 on Oct. 13, 2022, in Manhattan.



44th Annual PEF Convention starts October 23

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

The 2022 PEF Convention will be in Niagara Falls again this year and it will be held from Sunday, October 23, through noon Wednesday, October 26.

Between now and then you may want to talk to your delegate about issues at your worksite, and matters they may vote on or want to raise at the convention. The list of delegates is available [here](#).

PEF conventions are the highest policy making body of PEF and the delegates will have plenty of work to do. They will consider amendments to the PEF Constitution and debate and vote on resolutions. They will set the union's state and federal legislative agendas for 2023 and delegates from each state department and agency will establish the constituencies for their Executive Board seats. In addition, the delegates will hear from the union's leadership and guest speakers. They will attend workshops and take opportunities where they can to phone members and encourage them to vote in the November general election.

PEF Membership Benefits will offer a vaccination clinic on site, where PEF members, retirees and members of the public may stop by and receive their COVID and flu shots to help protect them through the winter. There will also be a blood drive conducted by PEF Membership Benefits on Tuesday, October 25. ([Click here for a flyer about the blood drive](#), which includes a phone number to call and make an appointment.)



"Our annual convention is a time to work and to learn, but it is also a great chance to see the breadth of our membership, to learn about other state departments, programs and operations, meet other delegates, network and build friendships," PEF President Wayne Spence said. "It is a unique opportunity to surprise ourselves and each other with our commitment and creativity. I look forward to it."

RECOMMIT TODAY!

NEW + EXISTING PEF MEMBERS

SIGN NOW!

Roswell Park members stand by breast cancer patients every step of the way

By KATE STICKLES

Pink is the color of October, as the country marks Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women after skin cancer, accounting for 30 percent of all new female cancers each year, according to the [American Cancer Society](#). In 2022, an estimated 287,850 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in women; about 51,400 new cases of ductal carcinoma in situ will be diagnosed; and about 43,250 women will die from breast cancer.

These are sobering statistics that PEF members in the breast cancer clinic at Roswell Park fight every day as they diagnose and treat patients.

For the past 16 years, nurse practitioner and PEF member Julie Mussell has spent her days surrounded by patients facing what may be the most difficult and frightening days of their lives. She and her colleagues' knowledge and expertise at Roswell Park can make all the difference for these patients.

"The lifetime risk for breast cancer in women is 1 in 8," Mussell said. "All women aged 40 and above should undergo breast cancer screening with annual mammogram and physical exams. Men and women who have higher-than-average risk due to family history of breast cancer or genetic mutation predisposing them for increased risk should have an MRI screening in addition to an annual mammography."

Roswell Park's [High Risk Breast Cancer Program](#) is the region's longest-running breast cancer risk assessment and prevention program, according to the website. The program offers the most advanced screening, surveillance, diagnostic and preventive methods to help patients take charge of their health. Men make up less than 1 percent of breast cancers and they often have a family history or carry a genetic mutation such as BRCA 1 and 2, making the high-risk program a vital tool in their arsenal.

Patients facing suspected breast cancer should first and foremost obtain an accurate diagnosis and undergo the appropriate workup prior to treatment, Mussell said.

"Some cancers are straightforward at diagnosis, but others require additional testing," she said. "For example, they may need scans such as a CT, PET or bone scan. There may be additional biopsies."

Along the way, patients benefit from a strong support system, whether it be friends, family, or Roswell Park staff.

"We have patient navigators, counselors and child life specialists who can help the patient navigate through this difficult and uncertain time," Mussell said.



PEF member Julie Mussell. Photo courtesy of Roswell Park

Who can get breast cancer?

Anyone can get breast cancer, and most women who develop breast cancer have no known risk factors.

Some risk factors include:

- A family history of breast cancer among your parents, siblings or at least two other close relatives.
- A personal or family history of ovarian cancer.
- Multiple cancers within your family.
- A relative diagnosed with breast cancer before menopause.
- A known gene mutation, such as BRCA1, BRCA2, TP53, or PTEN in your family.
- An abnormal breast biopsy.
- Prior radiation to the chest.



Types of breast cancer

Breast cancers are classified by the cell type in which the disease begins. Most begin in cells that line ducts that carry breast milk to the nipple, or glands that produce milk.

Non-invasive breast cancers have not spread from their original site into surrounding tissues. For example, when abnormal cells are found in breast lobules, but have not spread, the condition is called lobular neoplasia. It does not usually require treatment, but can be an indication a woman faces a higher risk of developing cancer later in life.

Ductal carcinoma in situ, also known as Stage 0 breast cancer, means cancer cells have been found only in cells that line breast milk ducts. Many of these will never spread or become invasive, but since there is no reliable way to determine that, almost all cases are treated.

Invasive breast cancers have already spread.

Eight out of 10 invasive breast cancers are classified as ductal carcinoma, which begins in cells that line milk ducts and spreads through the duct wall into neighboring tissue. Far less common is invasive lobular carcinoma, beginning in the lobules or glands that produce milk.

Subtypes of invasive breast cancer are even more rare, accounting for less than 5 percent of all breast cancers.

Inflammatory breast cancer is characterized by swelling and redness, inverted or retracted nipples, and thickening or pitting of the breast skin that resembles orange peel and may be itchy. It is rare but tends to be more aggressive and diagnosed at later stages, making treatment more challenging.

Learn more about all these types of cancers, [here](#).

Be on the lookout for these signs and symptoms

The most common symptom of breast cancer is a new lump or mass, according to the [American Cancer Society](#). Although most breast lumps are not cancer, a painless, hard mass that has irregular edges is more likely to be cancer. Breast cancers can be also soft, round, tender, or even painful.

Other possible symptoms include:

- Swelling of all or part of a breast (even if no lump is felt)
- Skin dimpling (sometimes looking like an orange peel)
- Breast or nipple pain
- Nipple retraction (turning inward)
- Nipple or breast skin that is red, dry, flaking, or thickened
- Nipple discharge (other than breast milk)
- Swollen lymph nodes under the arm or near the collar bone (Sometimes this can be a sign of breast cancer spread even before the original tumor in the breast is large enough to be felt.)
- Many of these symptoms can also be caused by benign (non-cancerous) breast conditions.

Making treatment her mission

For Mussell, the job is both inspiring and difficult.

"I truly enjoy taking care of patients with breast cancer," she said. "They have taught me so much over these years and I am a better person because of them. When I tell people I work at Roswell, I often hear, 'That must be hard.' But what is actually hard, is what these women go through.

"The impact a breast cancer diagnosis has on mental and physical health is tough, and patients are often also juggling careers and families," she said. "They are inspiring, and I am honored to be part of their journey."



PEF member helps secure historic wage recovery; works daily to ensure fair pay for all

By KATE STICKLES

As part of one of the [largest recoveries for a single worker in the history of the New York State Department of Labor \(NYSDOL\)](#), PEF member Shaun Abrilz played a role in returning \$271,527 in wages to a domestic worker who was chronically underpaid for three years.

The victim was hired as a domestic worker and companion for an elderly woman in Brooklyn. Her duties included bathing, changing, and feeding the woman, as well as performing cleaning duties, laundry and many other household tasks. On average, the victim worked 115 hours per week from 2015 to 2018 and was paid \$260 a week.

The historic wage recovery stands as a testament to the importance of the work done by NYSDOL. Abrilz is a Senior Labor Standards Investigator in the [Division of Labor Standards](#) and a PEF member for nine years.

"This will change her life," he said of the domestic worker. "We worked on it for a few years, and it took a lot of back and forth with attorneys to finally get her paid. She was very, very grateful. I feel like we actually did make a difference for her."

The Division of Labor Standards never has a shortage of work, with investigators routinely handling 150 cases each.

"We get a little over 10,000 claims for the state overall each year," Abrilz said. "We investigate claims where people are not getting meal breaks, not getting paid tips, not getting overtime pay, aren't getting paid minimum wage, child labor issues. We collect millions of dollars each year."

When Abrilz began working at NYSDOL, he was out in the field, visiting employers as part of a field unit. Now, as a Senior Investigator, he does more of his work via phone, but he still interacts with claimants, and he sees firsthand how much his work means to them.

"It's a chance to do something different," he said. "I feel like I'm giving back and at the end of the day, I feel that I'm making a difference in people's lives. If you are making minimum wage, you absolutely need every paycheck. You can hear their frustration and sometimes desperation when they are trying to get their wages and they feel they've been exploited."



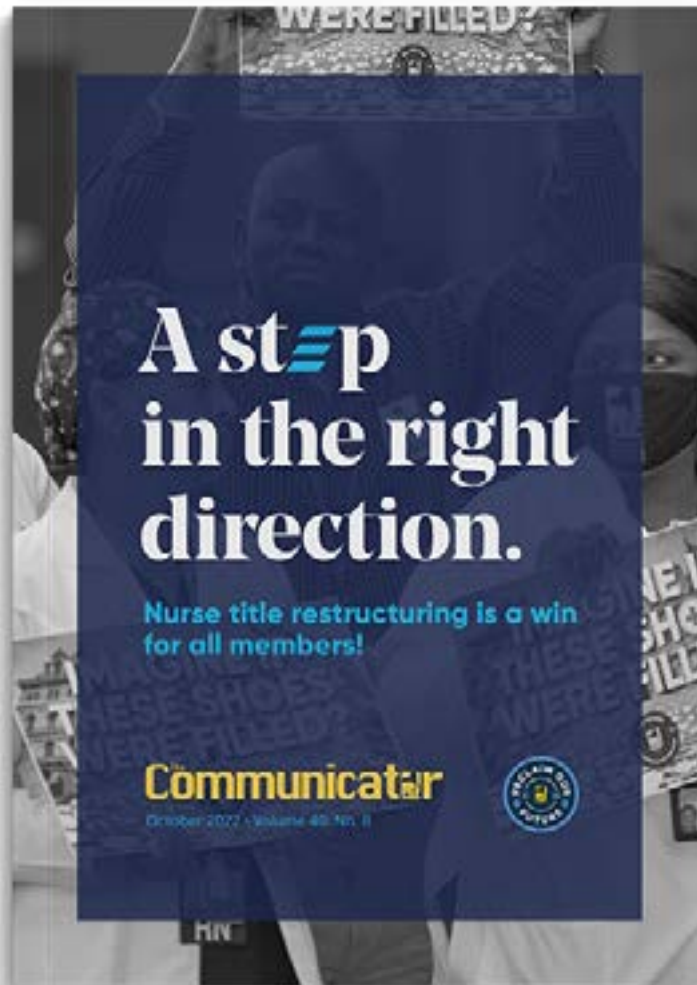
PEF member Shaun Abrilz

While some cases are a single claimant against a small employer, Abrilz said NYSDOL also takes on multiple claimants and large corporations, such as Walmart and Target. The department recently [recovered \\$191,000 in unpaid wages for 93 employees](#) working at the Buffalo-based company, Magellan Technology/Demand Vape.

"If people aren't getting paid correctly, they should reach out," he said. "You don't have to be exposed, we have a retaliation division to make sure that people aren't getting intimidated or retaliated against for reporting a claim."

The Division of Labor Standards also investigates and collects unpaid benefits, such as wage supplements, which includes vacation/holiday pay, paid sick leave, expense reimbursement, and more.

For more information, including how to file a claim, [click here](#).



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Get ready to vote!

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Election Day is November 8 and it's a good time for PEF members to familiarize themselves with the candidates and issues.

New York residents will vote for governor, lieutenant governor, state attorney general, state comptroller, U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, the state Senate and the state Assembly. You also will have the opportunity to vote on the state Environmental Bond Act, which you will find on the back of your paper ballot.

PEF has done a lot of the work for you via its regional and statewide Political Action Committees, who screen, interview and compare candidates. A list of those endorsed by the union is available [here](#). In addition, PEF supports the Environmental Bond Act.

The lines separating congressional districts and state legislative districts have been moved based on results of the 2020 Census, so you may find that you are now in a different district than you were in just two years ago. You can check with your county board of elections to verify which districts you are in and who the candidates are in those districts.

If you have moved, please confirm with your board of elections that your voter registration is up to date. If you are not registered to vote, you have until October 14 to do so in order to vote in this year's general election.

You don't have to wait until Election Day to vote. Check with your county board of elections to find out when and where early voting will be available for you. If you cannot get to the polls to vote, you may request an absentee ballot to mail in. You may request it online or by mail by October 24. You may go to the board of elections and request an absentee ballot in person up to November 7. Absentee ballots must be received by the board of elections by November 8. However, if you do request an absentee ballot this year, you will not be able to then go to the polls and vote on a regular ballot for scanning there. You would be allowed to complete and submit an affidavit ballot at your polling site.

"The votes we cast in these elections have very direct effects on our personal lives and on our work as public employees," PEF President Wayne Spence said. "Don't think that just because this is not a presidential election year that voting now is less important. It is crucially important and the results of these elections will affect you and your family. Our right and freedom to vote, to choose our representatives and to influence the policies and direction of our government is fundamental to our democracy and our society.

Don't waste it. Use it."

[New York Board of Elections](#)

[Find Your Polling Place](#)

[Register to Vote](#)



New, free trauma counseling benefit offered to PEF members

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

In its early years PEF recognized the dangers its members sometimes face on the job and the union began providing insurance through the Membership Benefits Program (MBP) for members who are assaulted or taken hostage on the job. It was a national first. No other union had ever done that for its members. All PEF members are still covered by this insurance (ATAC) at no charge.

Now, PEF MBP is taking that concern for its members further by offering Trauma Counseling as a benefit available to active, dues-paying PEF members only and at no charge to them. Covered traumas include both those that are work-related and others that are not related to work. This new benefit is brought to you by PEF MBP and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which is one of PEF's two parent unions.

"We know many people experience some type of trauma during their lifetime. This benefit is designed to provide help and healing, whenever needed, wherever a member may be," said PEF Membership Benefits Administrator Stephanie McLean-Beathley. "This benefit may be used in conjunction with EAP benefits and insurance benefits, and is a no-cost benefit. It provides three months of trauma counseling by a highly trained therapist via video, phone, or text after a covered incident, and all sessions are completely private."

Covered incidents include: Aggravated and sexual assault, domestic violence, mass shootings, acts of terror, major disasters, and workplace trauma including harassment, bullying, threats, infection by a contagious disease and more. To receive the benefit, you must file a claim within one year of the incident.

Trauma Counseling seeks to explore your emotional and physical reactions to the event. It seeks ways to help you process what has happened and cope with any reactions that you may be having, so that the trauma moves from being a current problem, to a memory.

[Visit this PEF MBP page to learn more](#) and to complete an inquiry form to determine if you are eligible for the benefit. Once a form is submitted online, you will know if your incident qualifies within 24-48 hours. If you qualify, you will be set up with a therapist by the provider.

A brochure on trauma counseling is available, [here](#).





Carried-over vacation accruals: Use or lose in 2022!

Employees with carried-over vacation accruals must use those accruals by December 31, 2022, or they will be forfeited.

Employees may have banks of both carried-over vacation accruals and regular non-carried-over accruals. This is because PEF and the State previously reached agreements during the COVID-19 pandemic allowing eligible employees to carry over unused vacation accruals over the contractual cap that would have been forfeited on April 1, 2020, April 1, 2021, and April 1, 2022. It is those carried-over vacation accruals that now must be used by December 31, 2022.

If you have carried-over accruals, please put in your vacation requests to use your time by the end of the year, even if you think it will be denied, as we need to be able to document when people are not given access to their accruals.

Agencies using LATS may have entries for both regular vacation accruals and carried-over accruals. If you are unsure about your balance of carried over accruals, you should request that information from your agency.

Regular vacation accruals that were not previously carried over can be over the contractual cap at any point between now and March 31, 2023. **However, any regular vacation accruals over the 40-day cap on April 1, 2023, will be forfeited in the absence of a further carry-over agreement.**

If you have any questions, please contact your PEF Field Representative.





Time is running out to apply for student loan forgiveness under temporary PSLF waiver

If you have federal student loan debt, look into your eligibility for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program today – a limited [waiver](#) implemented last fall allows many borrowers to count previously ineligible payments toward forgiveness.

Through October 31, 2022, you can get credit for past payments even if you did not make the payment on time; did not pay the full amount due; or you were not on the right payment plan.

The waiver is temporary, and you must apply by October 31. Borrowers will need to submit a PSLF form — the single application used for a review of employment certification, payment counts, and processing of forgiveness — on or before that date to have previously ineligible payments counted.

If you applied and were denied before last October, submit a new form – you may be surprised to find you are now eligible. [Click here](#) to read the stories of PEF members who have benefitted from the limited waiver.

The PSLF applies to borrowers with Direct Loans, those who have already consolidated into the Direct Loan Program, and those with other types of federal student loans who submit a consolidation application into the Direct Loan Program while the waiver is in effect. Borrowers who need to consolidate will have to submit a consolidation application by October 31.

Visit the online [PSLF Help Tool](#) to get started.

PEF training sessions to help you

If you are uncertain about your eligibility or have questions, PEF is holding five upcoming Zoom trainings to guide you through the program. Check your personal email for Zoom details. Reminders will be sent out each week. Dates remaining for sessions are Wed, Oct. 19 at 7 p.m. and Thurs., Oct. 27 at 6 p.m.

If you can't attend those dates and times, PEF's international union AFT is also offering virtual information sessions on student loan debt. [Click here to register for one of those free seminars.](#)

Use your membership counseling benefit

You can also take advantage of PEF Membership Benefits student loan [counseling](#) through Cambridge Counseling Services. The benefit is designed to provide a better understanding of student loan repayment options and/or debt consolidation opportunities.



Photo credit: Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services

At operations command and on the digging line, PEF members helped fight Minnewaska State Park fire

By KATE STICKLES

It took eight days of suppression efforts for responders to knock down and contain the Napanoch Point wildland fire in Minnewaska State Park, a testament to the dedication of state and local partners who took swift action to combat the blaze.

Forest Ranger What started as a suspected lightning strike on August 27 quickly spread to approximately 163 acres of the park. Crews also battled and contained nearby Stony Kill and Wurtsboro fires.

PEF members at the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) and the Department of Conservation (DEC) joined the more than 200 firefighters, bulldozer operators, pilots and other professionals and volunteers on site.

DEC Forester Kramer Kwaczala was one of them. A forester 1 in the Conversation Easements Program, Kwaczala has been a PEF member for more than 6 years.

"During the Napanoch Point fire, I was assigned to be a sawyer, someone who is qualified to run a chainsaw," he said. "At first, we assisted a bulldozer by cutting trees down in front of it so the operator could push them out of the way. Later in the week, I was assigned to clearing and digging line on the Red Trail."

Kwaczala began wildland firefighting in 2012 when he received a wildland fire certificate from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry Ranger School. He has extensive chainsaw experience from assisting forest rangers and from SUNY.

The collaboration between agencies kept those on the scene coordinated and safe, Kwaczala said.

"There was a great response from all participating agencies," he said. "Once we were all organized, the forest rangers ran an effective incident command. The fire grew rapidly. When I arrived on Sunday it was at 15 acres and by Wednesday more than 100.



DEC Forester Kramer Kwaczala

"During this growth, we all worked quickly as the high heat and fierce winds pushed the fire around," he said. "One afternoon, I looked up to see fire 20 yards in front of me, engorging the crown of a pitch pine. Due to the great coordination and organization, everyone stayed safe."

This wasn't Kwaczala's first in-state fire. He battled the Sam's Point Fire in 2016 and has gone out west twice with the DEC, first to Colorado in 2020 and then to California in 2021.

PEF members at DHSES are trained in fire incident command and several of them hit the ground running to help organize the Minnewaska fire response.

"The work of our staff is an integral part of the response," said PEF Division 179 Steward Ben Giles, a fire protection specialist. "While we were not actively fighting the fire, our members on site provided crucial help in the transport of wildland firefighters and equipment through the rough terrain, allowing for a more efficient response. Some of our staff were involved in the tracking of equipment, which is essential for accountability, safety, and financial tracking. Staff are also responsible for helping in the coordination of other agency's assets that may be requested to the site."

PEF fire protection specialists and an administrative specialist assisted in the Fire Operation Center, at the staging area, on transport missions, and with the DEC Incident Management Team.

While this fire might have been started by lightning, fire safety awareness can go a long way to preventing wildfires.

"If you are going to have a fire, make sure it is manageable and easy to extinguish," Kwaczala said. "Know how dry it is where you are going to have your fire. One of the biggest things is to extinguish your fire completely before you leave it – meaning dumping water on it and mixing it up a few times to make sure that it is cold to the touch."

Giles also stressed the importance of wildfire warnings and extinguishing your fires.

"It is important to keep fire safety in mind to prevent wildfires," he said. "Pay close attention to the NYS DEC and U.S. Forest Service wildfire warnings. Don't have fires during drought or dry times of year, follow burn bans, and don't burn during windy weather. Always have a means of putting out a fire when you have one and ensure that your fire is extinguished before leaving the area – no fires should be unattended."



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.

- Linda Agyemang (formerly Akuamoah-Sarfo) is a nurse 2 (psychiatric) working at Fishkill Correctional Facility in Beacon. Her position is at Central NY Psychiatric Center.
- LaShon Boyd is an habilitation specialist 1 at the Metro Developmental Disabilities Services Office in Manhattan.
- Sally Fontana is social work supervisor 1, LCSW at Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center in Utica.
- Cherie Griffin is a taxpayer services specialist 2 at the state Department of Taxation and Finance in Albany.
- Drina Holden is a senior certification analyst at the state Department of Economic Development in Manhattan.
- Christy Jaromack is a public information specialist 1 at the state Department of Environmental Conservation in Albany.
- Monica Kehagias-Gordon is an intensive case manager at Buffalo Psychiatric Center.
- Margaret Mendez is a motor vehicle referee at the state Department of Motor Vehicles in Brooklyn.
- Roxeen Mundy is an information technology specialist 2 at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
- John Reed is licensed master social worker 2 at Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center in Saugerties.
- Darlene (Gemma) Rose is an employment counselor for the state Labor Department in Amsterdam.
- Laquita White is a real estate specialist 1 at the state Transportation Department in Buffalo.
- Caitlin Wilkens is a research scientist 2 at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision main office in Albany.

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 189 and 190 of the 2019-23 PS&T Contract. If you, or a PEF member you know, need leave donations because of a medical issue, you may contact The Communicator to request publication of that need. Send requests to thecomunicator@pef.org, or call 518 396-8201. Be sure to provide your contact information.



Your monthly SS benefits going up in 2023

Fall is here and another election is right around the corner – less than a month away. There is also some good news about this year's Social Security COLA.

Social Security 8.7% Increase Social Security's Cost-of-Living Adjustment increase is expected to be 8.7%. That would make it the largest in four decades.

The 2023 COLA will provide a considerable boost to all of the 70 million Americans who rely on their earned Social Security benefits.

"The expected COLA will be an enormous help, but it is not enough. Congress could increase benefits even further by passing H.R. 5723, 'Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust,' which was introduced by Rep. John Larson (CT), or the Social Security Expansion Act, S. 4365, introduced by Sen. Bernie Sanders (VT). Both of these bills make the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share," said Joseph Peters, Jr., secretary-treasurer of the Alliance for Retired Americans. "By removing the artificial earnings cap that is currently \$147,000 per year, we could strengthen the Social Security Trust Fund while providing all retirees with increased benefits."

That cap is expected to increase to \$155,100 for 2023, according to an annual report released by the Social Security Board of Trustees on June 2.

Social Security expansion bills supported by most retiree organizations including PEF Retirees also require COLAs to be based on the CPI-E, the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly. The CPI-E reflects health care and housing costs, items that seniors actually spend their money on – a change that would result in fairer COLAs every year, not just every few decades.

As part of our mission, the PEF Retirees work to educate our members about the critical issues and other issues which will enhance their retirement. We need to educate ourselves on the issues that affect retirees.

Some politicians in Washington talk about Social Security and Medicare like they are handouts. These are politicians who support special interests whose agenda is hostile to seniors. Congressional representatives who wonder aloud if you really deserve those benefits. They look to Social Security and Medicare funds as easy cuts to pay down deficits and fund tax cuts for the wealthy. But you paid for those benefits-with your hard work and your work over decades.



We have to make sure politicians know it. If you don't speak up, your benefits could go down. We may love or hate politics but, however you feel, politics are an integral part of our lives. It is better to do what we can to keep and improve our situation as retirees.

We ask that you stay engaged and informed. This election year will be a pivotal year with each of us having an obligation to participate. Know the issues and make sure you vote for the candidates who are right on retirees issues.

Whatever you do, don't vote against your economic security. You earned and deserve retirement with a pension and affordable health care.

A fair increase in the Social Security COLA is in our economic interest as retirees.

Please vote, it is not only your right but also your responsibility.



Letters to the Editor

Interested in scholarships

To the Editor: I am a PEF member, and I am interested in speaking with someone about PEF scholarships. Please provide contact information so I may call them.

PETER C. GAAL
Huntington

Editor's Note: Here is a link to information about scholarships on the PEF website: <https://www.pef.org/about/scholarships/>. In addition, we typically publish information in The Communicator about scholarships in our combined December-January issue.

Sign a new contract with the state

To the Editor: CSEA already signed its contract with the state. What is the status of the PEF contract? PEF needs to sign the contract.

GIRISH DESAI
Stony Brook

Editor's note: The contract between CSEA and the state is not the same as PEF's contract with the state, and CSEA's previous contract expired. PEF's has not.

The current PEF contract with the state will expire April 1, 2023. PEF will have its first meeting with the state Office of Employee Relations next month (November) regarding a new contract.

The current PEF contract has 50 articles and is 258 pages long. Most provisions of the current contract will remain in effect until a new contract agreement is reached and ratified by PEF members. You can review the 2019-2023 PEF contract with the state here: https://www.pef.org/pef_files/files/pdf/2019-2023-Agreement.pdf.





**PEF is now
on Instagram!
Follow us today
[@nyspef](https://www.instagram.com/nyspef)**



September 17, 2022

The PEF Region 11 leadership conference was in full swing



October 10, 2022

PEF leaders, including Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue and Executive Board members Martin Robinson and Mickey Dobbins, rallied at the Amazon warehouse in Schodack, N.Y., showing solidarity for the workers there pushing the company to recognize the Amazon Labor Union!





September 15, 2022

PEF President Wayne Spence, third from right, joined Gov. Kathy Hochul for the signing ceremony on Sept. 15, 2022, of a bill that will help thousands of state public employees with student debt have some or all of it forgiven through the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. (Photo credit: Kevin P. Coughlin, Office of Governor Kathy Hochul)

October 3, 2022

It was a beautiful fall weekend at Critz Farms in Cazenovia, site of the Family Day celebration for PEF Regions 4 and 6. Thanks to all who came out for food, drink and a little union solidarity!



September 29, 2022

PEF Gives Back: Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue was joined by MBP Administrator Stephanie McClean-Beathley and PEF Director of Divisions Kristie Furman at a Catholic Charities of New York food distribution event at the Lansingburgh Boys and Girls Club.



September 29, 2022

PEF members at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center met with VP Darlene Williams, Region 11 Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor and other union leaders on as they followed up on issues and concerns shared during this summer's Statewide Officers Tour.

September 23, 2022

Congratulations to PEF VP Randi DiAntonio, for being honored for 25 years of service at the OPWDD Finger Lakes Employee Recognition Dinner! Regional Coordinators Leisa Abraham and Shelby Wisneski attended to show their support.



September 21, 2022

Great turnout at Manhattan Psych Center, where members heard from PEF officers and staff about the latest union accomplishments, upcoming contract negotiations, and the valuable Membership Benefits PEF has to offer.

