



PEF pushes budget priorities, flexes political muscle

Help us Fund Our Future for a thriving New York by sending pre-written letters to your legislators, highlighting the union's **eight budget priorities!**

^{The}**Communicator** PEF

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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



Hopeful Signs as State Budget Begins to Bloom in Albany

Spring is right around the corner and it's always one of my favorite times of year – the white and grey of winter turns green, flowers begin to bloom, and warmer weather rolls in. This year's Executive Budget shows similar signs of renewal for New York state, reflecting many of the priorities outlined in PEF's Fund Our Future campaign and hopefully setting the stage for a productive year.

PEF has been working hard in Albany to fight for changes to the proposed budget to better align with our union priorities. We submitted testimony on several issues, from [workforce development](#) to public protection, to mental hygiene, and we held a press conference outside the Senate chamber earlier this month to talk about ways to fill the 12,500 vacancies statewide, with Sens. Robert Jackson and Jessica Ramos by our side.

As the process rolls on, we've created a letter-writing campaign focused on eight [PEF Budget Priorities for FY 2023-2024](#). Please take a few minutes to send a [pre-written letter](#) to your legislators letting them know why it's so important they Fund Our Future for a thriving New York!

Recently, Gov. Hochul instructed the Office of Employee Relations (OER) to implement [Paid Parental Leave](#) (PPL) for M/C employees but instructed them to negotiate PPL agreements with unions as part of their collective bargaining agreements.

Our PS&T contract expires on April 1, and we see no reason to wait. We maintain this no-cost benefit should immediately be made available to PEF members via a Memorandum of Understanding. So far, OER has refused. We will continue to fight for this.

PEF [scored another win](#) for nurses with the signing of an amended "no mandatory overtime" law with language that would help hold health care facilities accountable for mandating overtime to meet staffing needs. We have been saying for years that health care facilities should not use mandated overtime to fill gaps in their staffing and those that do should be penalized for it. That option now exists.

In recognition of International Women's Day March 8, the PEF Statewide and New York City Women's Committees [invited delegates from Public Services International \(PSI\)](#) to the Region 10/11 office in Manhattan as a show of solidarity for their advocacy at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) conference.

As Women's History Month continues, we are soliciting nominations for [PEF Everyday Heroines](#) until the end of this month. We'll highlight those heroines in April, but in this issue, we feature a [PEF member at the New York State Museum](#) who helped curate an exhibit on female photographer Berenice Abbott, whose Changing New York exhibit showcases New York City's dramatic changes in the early 1900s. It's well worth a visit if you're in Albany.

I wish you all a healthy and happy Spring.

In Unity,
Wayne Spence

A stylized, handwritten signature of Wayne Spence in dark blue ink. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Wayne' being more prominent than the last name 'Spence'.

Wayne Spence
PEF President



PEF President Wayne Spence, at podium, and Vice President Randi DiAntonio, to his right, led a "State of the State Worker" press conference on March 1 outside the New York State Senate.

PEF to legislators: Bolster state workforce by improving Civil Service, adjusting pay grades, and fixing Tier 6

Ahead of a joint budget hearing on workforce development, PEF President Wayne Spence and Vice President Randi DiAntonio called for changes that would address pay equity, the Tier 6 pension plan, and Civil Service shortcomings, which would drive recruitment and retention efforts.

The press conference took place outside the Senate Chambers in Albany and PEF leaders and members were joined by State Senators Robert Jackson and Jessica Ramos, who chair the Civil Service and Pension and Labor committees, respectively.

"Public employees take care of this state, and we have to really take care of them," DiAntonio said. "The world of work is changing, and we need to get on board with that change if we really want to attract the best and the brightest and if we want to keep the folks that we currently have on the job."

Lower starting salaries, lack of promotional opportunities, an overreliance on overtime, and an inferior Tier 6 pension plan have decimated and starved the state workforce.

"There is a national shortage of skilled municipal workers," Spence said. "Their value cannot be understated. There was once a time when the state didn't care: 'Oh, there's nowhere to go.' Telework and technology is making it so that other states are looking to places like New York for the excellence that we have."

Many people are jumping to the private sector for opportunities to improve work-life balance. PEF encourages state agencies to consider alternate work schedules and remote work to help retain staff.

"We're heartened by the fact we are sitting here having a dialogue about improving staffing at state agencies and improving how government operates," she said. "We're hoping that a new day is dawning, and we thank the governor for lifting the hiring freeze last year. We are committed to rebuilding this workforce. There are things that we need to fast track."

She emphasized the staggering shortage of staff and its repercussions.

"We've seen over the last several years an increased reliance on overtime," she said. "Our workforce is stressed out, they're exhausted, and they work under sometimes toxic and unsafe working conditions. Not only do we have a problem on the front end with recruitment; we have a problem on the back end with retention."

According to statistics from the governor's office, the state is down 12,500 workers, with 26% more ready to retire in the next five years.

"We don't have people coming on board fast enough to replace them," said DiAntonio. "We need an emergency staffing plan."

The onboarding process itself doesn't help matters.

"Onboarding can take six months," DiAntonio said. "We're losing good people."

She said the state used to do mentorships and internships, connecting with colleges to bring in young professionals who then stayed in state service. Now, new hires are thrown into the fire, she said, and oftentimes overwhelmed.

"PEF fully supports the various improvements to the civil service testing, hiring and on-boarding processes proposed in the Executive Budget," she said.

[PEF submitted several budget requests](#), including legislation to standardize mandatory employee contributions at 3% after 10 years for Tier 6 participants and legislation to modernize the Civil Service pay structure, develop a job evaluation system to align Civil Service with the private sector, and adjust every title upward at least two pay grades.

"We know pay equity is a huge problem," said DiAntonio. "We know many of our titles can go to the private sector and make more money. And we're hearing from Tier 6 workers that it isn't worth making a career out of state service."

Her testimony also urged lawmakers to support expansion of the Healthcare Worker Bonus program to include all staff deemed "essential" during the COVID-19 state of emergency.

"While health care employees rightly received supplemental payments for their services during this crisis, tens of thousands of state workers have not received any hazard pay," DiAntonio said. "This has hurt morale and the overall culture of work in state government."

As lawmakers continue to work toward enacting a budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024, all PEF members are urged to participate in the union's letter-writing campaign, which allows them to send letters to local lawmakers urging support of PEF's budget priorities. Get started sending letters, [here](#).



PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio's testimony begins at 2:42:30.



PEF member achieves loan forgiveness, erasing \$154k in debt; don't wait, see if you're eligible now!

Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger successfully navigated the PSLF program and recently received confirmation that her loans, totaling more than \$154,000, had been forgiven.

Bridger applied before the expiration of the limited waiver last year. While she initially tried to tackle the program on her own, she eventually contacted Summer, a company brought in by PEF's parent union, AFT, to assist members.

"The Department of Education tried telling me I only had 26 of the 121 payments," Bridger said. "I knew I had made more that qualified. That's when I got Summer involved. They were able to verify that I had in fact qualified for all the payments and the Federal Student Loan Program updated my qualifying payments accordingly."

For Bridger, like many others, loan forgiveness has made a huge impact on her family.

"I cannot describe the weight that has been lifted off my shoulders now that this financial burden has been relieved," she said. "I began my career in the public sector under the promise of student loan forgiveness and it has finally come true."

She has a message for members who haven't applied yet.

"Apply! I was skeptical, but no more," she said. "When individuals ask, what does your union do for you? Financial freedom is what they gave me. Thank you, my union family!"

You can still apply; don't wait

The outcome of the Supreme Court's decision on the Biden/Harris student loan debt forgiveness plan is still up in the air, with federal student loan payments set to resume 60 days after a decision is handed down but no later than September 1. Whatever the court decides, their decision will have no effect on PEF members' eligibility for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), which will continue to be an option.

The limited Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) waiver period ended last Halloween, but there's another opportunity that all members should take advantage of, and the deadline for that relief option is May 1, 2023.

That's when a one-time adjustment of income-driven repayment (IDR) counters will address past inaccuracies and fix payment counting going forward.

"If you were deemed ineligible in the past because you had the wrong loans (primarily FFEL loans), or were in an ineligible repayment plan, this will correct that," said Marty Lynch of [Cambridge Credit Counseling](#), a PEF member benefit vendor, who spoke at the Region 1-5 Leadership Conference in Ithaca February 25. "This is a game changer."

Loans not made through the William Ford "Direct" loan program must be consolidated into a Direct consolidation loan by May 1 to receive the adjustment. Borrowers should request a Direct loan consolidation on [studentaid.gov](#), not through their servicer or any private lender such as SoFi, College Ave, or LendKey.

"They're all reputable lenders, but if you consolidate your loans through any of them, you'll have converted your federal loans into private loans and made yourself ineligible for all federal loan forgiveness programs," Lynch said. "If you only have Direct loans already, you won't need to do anything. The nice thing about this mini-waiver is that it applies to for-profit and non-profit workers alike."

The one-time account adjustment that will count toward loan forgiveness includes:

- Any months in repayment status, regardless of the payments made, loan type, or repayment plan.
- 12 or more months of consecutive forbearance or 36 or more months of cumulative forbearance will count toward the total needed for forgiveness.
- Months spent in economic hardship or military deferments after 2013.
- Months spent in any deferment (except for in-school deferment) prior to 2013.
- Any time in repayment on earlier loans prior to consolidation of those loans into a Direct consolidation loan.

- While for-profit workers will need 20 to 25 years of payments to qualify for loan forgiveness, PEF members only need to make 120 payments. If you act by May 1, you can receive retroactive credit for years of payments that would otherwise have been considered ineligible.

- If you won't have reached 120 payments by May 1, this opportunity is still for you. You'll just need to make any remaining payments through one of the government's four income-driven plans.

It is estimated more than 3.6 million borrowers will receive at least three years of credit toward forgiveness under IDR. For more information on the adjustments and changes, [click here](#).

Loan forgiveness can change lives and takes time, Lynch said. "We have seen several people with more than six figures forgiven," he said. "Many more in the \$60,000 range."

He suggested members find out what loans they have and do their due diligence. You can access federal loan information on [Studentaid.gov](#). The registration process for the portal takes a few days.

"Make sure you get your information," said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio. "And tell your members to get their information, they may not realize that they are eligible."



PEF Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger



PEF and PSI mark International Women's Day in New York City

By **ROB MERRILL**

For a few hours on International Women's Day, March 8, the PEF Region 10/11 office in New York City was filled with the sound of people talking Portuguese, Spanish, French, and a few more languages as well. Twenty delegates from Public Services International (PSI), in town for the annual U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) conference, gathered with members of the PEF Women's Committee and representatives from AFT for an evening of fellowship and conversation.

PSI is a global union federation that counts among its affiliates both AFT and SEIU, PEF's two international parent unions. AFT approached the PEF Statewide and New York City Women's Committees with the idea to invite the PSI delegates to the Manhattan office as a show of solidarity for the work they do advocating for the rights of women at the UNCSW.

PEF Vice President Darlene Williams welcomed the women at a reception featuring authentic NYC cuisine, including a hot dog cart, miniature pastrami sandwiches, potato knishes and New York cheesecake.

"Our goal was simple – to show support for these women who represent all of us at the U.N.," she said. "The issues they're tackling – from privatization to worker safety to the digitalization of public services – are some of the same issues PEF is discussing with New York State," she said.

The women came to New York from 10 countries: Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Eswatini, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, and South Africa.

PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli, from Brazil, kicked off a group discussion during dinner.

"We need to strengthen our ties and continue to defend workers if we want to defend democracies," she said. "We believe that investing in public services defends human rights much more than investing in conflict, war and armaments."



Various women then shared their stories, some in their native language as a staffer from PSI provided translation. Many spoke about their experiences during the pandemic, which led to nods around the table from PEF members. Remember health agencies providing masks to doctors, but neglecting the orderlies who had to clean the rooms of COVID-positive patients? It happened in Peru, just like it did in New York. Another woman, a nurse, spoke about sleeping in her garage for months for fear of infecting her family. And a third echoed a story from a PEF member about being told to wear coffee filters on her face because there weren't enough N95s.

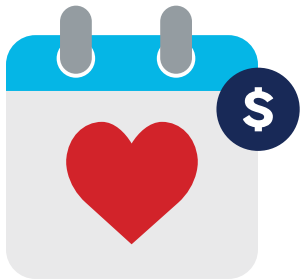
President Wayne Spence concluded the evening with some final remarks. He said his participation in various PSI forums over the past year has driven home one key point – organized labor across the world faces the same threats.

"We have so much more in common than our differences," said Spence. "The connections we made here today will help PEF continue to advocate for all its members."



PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanell chats with President Spence at the reception.

PEF working to immediately secure fully paid parental leave for members



PEF has requested the state enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to immediately offer PEF members Paid Parental Leave (PPL), which grants 12 weeks of fully paid leave without charge to accruals for the care of a newborn, newly adopted or fostered child. There is no employee contribution for this benefit.

This PPL program announced by Gov. Kathy Hochul is only available to state employees. Hochul instructed the Office of Employee Relations (OER) to implement PPL for M/C employees, who are already required by law to pay into another leave program, Paid Family Leave (PFL). In her State of the State address on Jan. 10, Hochul instructed OER to negotiate PPL agreements with unions as part of their collective bargaining agreements.

"It's PEF's position that a cost-free benefit like this – which does not require any payroll deduction – can be enacted immediately via an MOU," said President Wayne Spence. "Thus far, the state

has refused, instead insisting PPL must be taken up as part of full contract negotiations. We are ready to sign an MOU immediately. If we must take it to a higher level, that's what we'll do. There is no reason to take this to the bargaining table since there is no cost to our members."

PPL is different from the statutory PFL, which requires payroll deductions and does not provide full pay for family leave absences covered by the law. PFL applies to all private-sector New York state employers and employees, and to M/C state employees. PFL must be negotiated for state employees represented by unions like PEF. During the last contract negotiation cycle, PEF did not opt into PFL because a majority of members were opposed. Instead, PEF advocated for a fully paid parental leave benefit without cost to employees, exactly like the one the governor has now implemented for M/C employees.

"PPL is what PEF has always advocated for – a true, cost-free benefit for state employees that can serve as a recruitment and retention tool and makes New York a desirable employer for many individuals," Spence said. "PEF thanks Gov. Hochul for recognizing that and we will continue to work to secure this valuable benefit for PEF members as soon as possible."



PEF Regions 1-5 leaders hone their skills

By KATE STICKLES

It was a full house at the Statler Hotel at Cornell University as nearly 100 PEF leaders from Region 1 through 5 gathered February 24 to 26 to learn how to best serve their members in everything from approaching leadership with positivity and mental resilience, to the ins and outs of the Civil Service system and workers' compensation.

Keynote speaker Dr. Steve Birchak, aka "Dr. Bird," brought his usual humor and various props as he talked about the power of positivity when dealing with high levels of stress, whether from understaffing, the continued threat of COVID-19, or the prevalence of negativity in the world.

"The news seems to be nothing but bad," he said. "But when there is a tragedy, there are hundreds that come to their aid. The bad guys get all the headlines, but we are capable of helping each other. In a union, we take care of each other."

Union leaders bear more responsibility and must be aware that their behavior and demeanor trickles down to those they serve, he said. "Leadership roles are a calling. Attitudes and actions have a lot of influence on how members perceive the union."

Birchak shared ways to improve communication, leadership, and attitude, emphasizing the power of positive thinking, self-discipline, poise, personal growth, integrity, mindfulness, and vulnerability, among others.

Following Birchak's workshops, PEF Health & Safety brought in speakers to address the importance of reporting workplace injuries to human resources and PEF, and why filing a worker's compensation claim is so important.

People are encouraged to file even if there is no lost time because an injury may cause lasting medical issues and problems can reoccur years down the road. There are many rights and benefits in addition to wage loss that make filing a claim worth the effort, such as reimbursements for medical equipment.

Physical injuries are one thing – but people can also suffer psychological trauma on the job and those cases can also be pursued.

These can include physical injury with a mental reaction; seeing or being involved in a traumatic event; or workplace stressors, like attacks in the workplace, returning to a location where a traumatic event took place, short staffing, and even extraordinary amounts of overtime. These cases are harder to win, but leaders were encouraged to urge their members to report and file a claim.

Other workshops for leaders included an overview of the Civil Service system, what Membership Benefits has to offer, basic and advanced grievance handling, and how to talk to members about contributing to COPE, the fund dedicated to lobbying on behalf of unions at the federal level.





PEF Region 1



PEF Region 2



PEF Region 3



PEF Region 4



PEF Region 5



Relief Fund donations go toward gift cards for members impacted by Buffalo Blizzard

By KATE STICKLES

The generosity of members across the state generated more than \$9,000 through the PEF Relief Fund for members in Region 1 impacted by the unprecedented snowstorm over the Christmas holiday.

"When the blizzard hit Buffalo, PEF activated its Relief Fund to do what we do best -- help our fellow union sisters and brothers," said President Wayne Spence. "As promised, we are distributing the money directly to members who worked 48 hours continuously during the blizzard or suffered damage as a result of the storm."

As of March 8, the fund has about \$750 left to distribute. PEF will send \$25 Target gift cards, on a first come, first served basis, to members from Region 1 who fill out a form here and who are



determined to be eligible. Once confirmed, the physical card will be mailed to a home address. Region 1 members may also download the form here, fill it out and then email it to PEFOnline@pef.org.

Cards will be distributed until the entirety of the fund is depleted.





PEF member Karen Quinn, a senior historian and curator at the New York State Museum, works in the art department and assisted with the Berenice Abbott "Changing New York" exhibit.

Berenice Abbott documented a changing New York; PEF members at the New York State Museum help showcase her work

By KATE STICKLES

In 1929, photographer Berenice Abbott returned from abroad to find New York City dramatically different than when she left nearly a decade earlier.

Hundreds of 19th-century buildings were gone – replaced with towering skyscrapers. The oldest parts of Manhattan, below Fourteenth Street, saw the most extreme changes as buildings were razed and new construction took their place.

"Abbott came back after eight years in France and was stunned by the changes," said PEF member Karen Quinn, a senior historian and curator at the New York State Museum (NYSM). "She began to document the changes."

The building boom inspired Abbott to photograph the new face of New York. Backed by the Federal Art Project, she got to work. Using a large-format camera, Abbott traversed the city seeking examples of the dramatic changes. Skyscrapers juxtaposed with old tenement buildings. Billboards towering over monuments. She focused much of her work in the oldest parts of the city, avoiding public spaces like Central Park and tourist sites.

By 1940, Abbott had completed her Changing New York collection, considered to be one of the monumental achievements of 20th-century photography. She created two sets of 305 exhibition prints for the Museum of the City of New York, and a partial set of 40 for the NYSM.

Abbott's photography is conceptually brilliant, Quinn said.

"It's more than just sight lines, so much more goes into it," she said. "The angles, how she cropped it, how she focuses on one thing. There is so much thought behind it. Her photos give us a sense of New York City at a moment in time."

Only a few of Abbott's photos are on display in the museum's New York Metropolis Hall due to light sensitivity, Quinn said, and those are scans to protect the originals from fading. You can view the NYSM Changing New York online collection [here](#).

Quinn said her work as an art historian for the state focuses on art and culture in all mediums, not just photography. Historians and curators at the museum study the intersection of art and culture and share it with the public through the museum's exhibits.

"We work with every kind of art form," she said. "Painting, sculpture, photography, drawing, anything on paper. Anything you can think of as art."



Berenice Abbott in an undated photo, c. 1930s. Photographer and source unknown. Courtesy of the New York State Museum.



Giving shelter dogs a better chance for adoption

By KATE STICKLES

Incarcerated individuals at Groveland Correctional Facility in Sonoma, N.Y., have become an integral partner when it comes to helping dogs find forever homes.

Through the Shelter Pups and Incarcerated Individuals Rehabilitation and Integration Training (SPIRIT) program, PEF members at Groveland work with incarcerated individuals to train shelter dogs from the Hornell Humane Society in basic obedience, leash walking, and socialization. They can then be certified as Canine Good Citizens, which helps their odds of adoption.

"The SPIRIT dog program is for incarcerated veterans to take in puppies and dogs that have been in the Hornell Humane Society dog shelter for either a long time, or dogs that need extra training to become a more adoptable candidate," said Anne Jordan, an offender rehabilitation coordinator at Groveland, and a PEF member

for more than seven years. "The humane society wanted to partner with prisons to help dogs become more adoptable and less stressed. Dogs in shelters are often very stressed, and living with incarcerated individuals lets them live an 'almost' normal life."

Jordan oversees the program, visiting the dogs and their trainers daily.

"I work as the middle person between the shelter and the incarcerated individual handlers," she said. "I often take the dogs out on walks around the facility, taking them into work locations to visit with employees. This socializes the dog, gets them used to accepting strangers' greetings, plus who doesn't love a good dog petting? I make sure the dogs have everything they need: food, treats, crates, leashes."

Jewish Committee to host Purim Celebration

The PEF Jewish Committee invites members to a Purim Celebration from 5:45 to 7:30 p.m. March 16.

There will be an in-person event at the New York City PEF Office with dinner provided. The in-person event is limited to the first 40 RSVPs. For those who cannot attend in person, the celebration will also be presented via Zoom and by telephone.

RSVP as soon as possible to RSchwartz@pef.org. Please indicate if you will be attending in person or via Zoom. The committee will forward you further information, including whether they are able to accommodate you in person.

If you do not have a computer, you can call 516-642-5741 and leave a message with your name, address, telephone number and how you would prefer to attend.

For those coming in person, building security is tight and requires all names be submitted in advance for admission.





Governor signs law to hold health care facilities accountable for mandating overtime for nurses

PEF scored another win for nurses with the signing of an amended “no mandatory overtime” law with language that would help hold health care facilities accountable for mandating overtime to meet nurse staffing needs.

“Health care facilities should not use mandated overtime to fill gaps in their staffing and those that do should be penalized for it,” said President Wayne Spence. “Our health care professionals work tirelessly to serve the people of New York and they should not be punished because of their employer’s inability to create adequate staffing plans.”

The first law dealing with mandatory overtime for nurses went into effect in 2009, but contained no enforcement mechanism. It also excluded nurses at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) facilities.

“PEF worked hard to see this bill passed and to ensure our nurses at OCFS are now included,” Spence said. “We couldn’t have done it without the support of our members, who participated in letter-writing campaigns, lobbying and other advocacy activities.”

Gov. Kathy Hochul signed the original bill into law in December 2022, but her approval was conditioned on amendments. The resulting new bill was signed into law March 3 and requires facilities to make “good faith” efforts to mitigate the use of mandatory overtime and establish criteria for what that includes and report to the Department of Labor (DOL) the use of mandatory overtime if it occurs more than 15 days in a month or 45 days in a consecutive three-month period.

The law also establishes optional civil penalty guidelines, including a new penalty for facilities that do not report their use of mandatory overtime, and it creates a DOL enforcement officer position to investigate complaints of violations.

It will be in full effect by September 2023.



Photo shows the Lawrence textile strike of 1912, also known as the “Bread and Roses” strike. (Source: Flickr Commons project, 2009)

‘Bread and Roses’ strike: Highlighting child labor, workplace safety, unequal distribution of wealth

By KATE STICKLES

In 1912, textile workers worked long hours for dismal wages. At the American Woolen Company mill in Lawrence, Mass., more than half the workers were women and girls between the ages of 14 and 18.

A Massachusetts law made the situation worse by reducing the number of hours women and children could work from 56 to 54 – the resulting pay cut, several loaves of bread worth, led to thousands walking out of the mills.

By the end of that week, more than 20,000 joined picket lines.

The Bread and Roses Strike was born.

During the strike, marchers raised signs of “We want bread, but we want roses, too!” and after 100 years, that rally call still resonates as workers continue to fight for workplace safety and against the unequal distribution of wealth and income in this country.

The Bread and Roses strike saw dozens of immigrant communities unite under the leadership of the Industrial Workers of the World. Strikers are credited with the advent of the moving picket line – allowing them to avoid arrests for loitering.

Despite that, things did get ugly.

As strikers organized large marches, disrupted businesses by entering stores and not purchasing anything, and even sent hundreds of children to live with supporters in other cities, the state’s militia broke up actions and pulled out all the stops to combat the strike.

Things came to a highly public tipping point when a group of strikers accompanied children to a train station, intending to send them outside Lawrence, and were confronted by police.



"Police surrounded and brutally clubbed women and children alike, then threw them into patrol wagons," an article from LaborRights.org stated. "The press reported on the ugly scene, and people all around the country were outraged. A congressional investigation began."

American Woolen caved and settled.

On March 12, 1912, workers won a 15% pay raise, double overtime pay, and a promise of no discrimination against strikers. They struck

a blow against child labor and the strike is considered an important step in organized labor's struggle to gain a foothold in this country.

Where did the phrase "bread and roses" come from?

Many say it was based on a 1911 poem by James Oppenheim. [Click here for the full text of the poem.](#)



Strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, with many children posed on sidewalk. (Photo source: loc.gov)



Contract Team ready for meaningful negotiating

Since December 2022, the PEF Contract Team has presented the State with 15 comprehensive proposals based on the economic and workplace priorities expressed by PEF members.

"Our team is prepared to move negotiations forward with detailed, thoughtful proposals," said Contract Team Chair Darlene Williams, following negotiations with the State on Feb. 7 and 8. The Office of Employee Relations (OER), in contrast, has kept its proposals broad, she said. "OER has only put forth general concepts, not full language proposals with the details required to engage in meaningful and productive bargaining."

Williams said there appears to be a disconnect between the OER negotiating team and Governor Kathy Hochul.

"OER's approach is out-of-step with our governor," Williams said. "She has been steadfast in her respect for the State workforce and wants to assure the State is an employer of choice."

It will be critical that PEF members show their support for the Contract Team in the coming months.

"We know we can count on our PEF sisters and brothers to stand with our Contract Team as the team stands firm to achieve a fair and respectful contract," Williams said. "Stay tuned to your email and PEF's social media for information about mobilization actions in March."

The union is scheduled to sit down again with OER on March 21 and 22.



Executive Board seats filled in first-quarter special election

Two vacant seats on the PEF Executive Board were filled during the first-quarter special election, and balloting will be held to determine who will fill three contested seats.

Tanya Oliver was elected to **Seat 25**, representing certain members at the Department of Corrections, and Stephen Powers was elected to **Seat 425**, representing certain members in the state Department of Public Service.

Their terms of office will be until July 31, 2024.

William Ferguson, Kathryn Bamberger, and Sheri Smith were certified for **Seat 55**, which represents certain members at Economic Development; Tamara Martin and John Nicotina were certified for **Seat 255**, which represents certain members at the Law Department; and Mamadou Diallo and Jeffrey Sardegna were certified for **Seat 535**, which represents certain members at the Department of Transportation.

Ballots will be mailed to these constituencies on February 22, by the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be returned no later than 5 p.m. March 15. Ballots will be counted on March 16 by AAA in New York City.

No candidates were certified following petitioning for 11 remaining vacancies and nominees for those seats, and any that become vacant in the interim, will be sought in the second-quarter special election that begins in April.

The vacant seats are:

Seat 1, Agriculture & Markets

Seat 15, Civil Service

Seat 90, Higher Education Services Corporation

Seat 101, SUNY Stonybrook

Seat 104, SUNY Stonybrook

Seat 172, ITS

Seat 395, OMH/OPWDD

Seat 545, Political Subdivisions of NYS

For more information, visit the [PEF Elections page](#).



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

<https://www.pef.org/emailme/>





SUNY Upstate drops bid to acquire Crouse Hospital

SUNY Upstate Medical University halted its efforts to acquire Crouse Hospital in Syracuse, instead deciding to enter into a strategic affiliation agreement between the two hospitals.

"We said loudly and clearly from the moment the merger was first proposed that this was a bad idea for employees of both hospitals and the patients they serve," said PEF President Spence. "It made no sense to have two workforces coming together whose conditions of employment would be governed by two separate collective bargaining agreements, even as many of them did the same job."

In 2022, the PEF Executive Board voted to move the March 2023 quarterly board meeting from Albany to Syracuse in order to hold a public demonstration against the merger. PEF was in the final stages of planning for that rally when Upstate announced that the merger has been called off.

"Upstate heard us," Spence said. "It was our threat of a rally that got us here." He thanked Upstate nurse and Executive Board member Rachel Amodio-Kopp for advocating for the rally to serve the best interests of her coworkers.

The decision assures "each hospital will remain completely independent and all your privileges, compensation, benefits, union representation, and other aspects of employment will remain as they are," according to a statement to employees from Upstate President Mantosh Dewan.

"Both institutions will continue to operate as separate and independent legal entities governed as they are today," the statement continued. "The affiliation will provide a structure for joint initiatives on key patient services, educational programs for health care providers and provide a platform for future initiatives."

PEF working to shape the Executive Budget in the best interests of members, the people they serve

PEF submitted written testimony on Feb. 7 to a committee focused on the public protection components of the governor's executive budget proposal. The written testimony and the remarks made by in-person witnesses will help the committee as it considers how best to fund state-operated services for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals; including ways to improve staffing and safety, and add hazard pay at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS).

State-operated services and hazard pay

PEF feels this year's budget surplus provides the state a unique opportunity to address public safety concerns around mental health and addiction, reinvest savings to support greater mental health, wellness, education, training, and addiction services to incarcerated individuals, and bolster DOCCS' ranks amid a staffing decline.

PEF fully supports the effort to reduce the state's incarcerated population, but the work needs to fall to well-trained and educated state employees and not private providers. The over-reliance on private providers is a detriment to the continuum of care and misses the mark on integrated services for those with multiple needs.

Hazard pay, beyond the provisions of the Healthcare Workforce Bonus program included in last year's budget, could go a long way toward retaining staff and is a fitting recognition for the hard work and sacrifices made during the pandemic.

PEF is urging legislators to include hazard pay in this budget for all staff who interacted with incarcerated individuals and parolees daily, as well as others deemed "essential" during the pandemic.

Community supervision legislation and amendments

The union fully supports the governor's intentions with the "Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) program, the "Supervisors Again Violent Engagement" (SAVE) initiative, and increased funding for re-entry services.

PEF is asking the legislature to pass GIVE and SAVE, as well as enact legislation to develop a real system of integrated state-operated wellness, mental health, addiction, job placement and other programs to help formerly incarcerated individuals access services for success.

"Less is More"

The "Less is More" law, as passed, needs to be amended to better serve parolees, parole officers, and the community. While PEF supports portions of the law, like providing earned time credits for

adhering to a parole plan and ensuring parolees have expedited proceedings, the law falls short in other ways.

Since 2021, the number of parolees in New York City has decreased. Over this same period, the number of parolees rearrested for a misdemeanor or felony has increased. PEF believes this to be, in part, due to some parolees no longer feeling compelled to adhere to addiction treatment, mental health plans, or other parole plans because Less is More no longer allows for their reincarceration for failure to follow required plans.

PEF is calling for a higher standard for violent felony offenders; real sanctions for parolees convicted of violent felonies; correcting shortcomings of earned time credits that allow those who do not adhere to parole plans to also receive the credits; and instituting a "red flag" provision for at-risk parolees allowing officers to seek an immediate judicial review and determination for limited reincarceration for violations representing immediate danger to themselves or the community.

"HALT"

In the interest of protecting incarcerated individuals and staff from ongoing assaults by other incarcerated individuals, PEF is asking for changes to the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Act (HALT).

Suggested policy solutions include utilizing the state's excess correctional facility space to establish separate, segregated space to provide protective options for those targeted; reestablish the use of "step down" programs to allow earned privileges and the use of fewer restraints for good behavior; expand professional mental and behavioral treatment; establish a merit system to shape positive behavior; and continued expansion of re-entry services.



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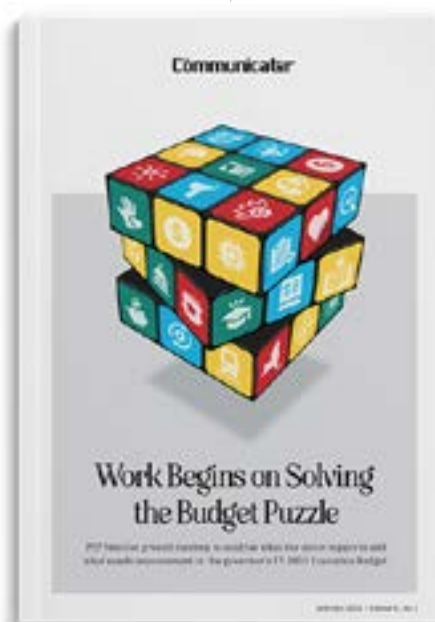
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PEF social workers lobby legislators for pay reallocation, improved working conditions

By KATE STICKLES

New York's dedicated social workers are burnt out, underpaid, feel unsafe at work, and face skyrocketing caseloads - all while continuing to provide vital care to a patient population that has grown more complex and difficult to serve.

It's time for change.

That's the message more than 20 PEF social workers conveyed to legislators in Albany on February 14. PEF joined members of the National Association of Social Workers' New York State chapter on Social Worker Lobby Day to share stories and advocate for solutions.

They called on legislators to address pay inequity by title reallocation; review the potential for a geo pay differential; conduct continuous recruitment exams; look at financial aid programs; and form partnerships for training, education, and safety in the workplace.

It was standing room only as PEF members carried their message to Sen. Robert Jackson, a former PEF member and staffer and now chair of the Senate's Civil Service and Pensions committee.

A PEF member from Creedmoor Psychiatric Center kicked off the session.

"There is chronic understaffing," she said. "We can't attract or keep staff. We are dealing with a much harder population and the violence, it's out of control. We are pushed to push patients out as fast as possible, and they took away the community resources."

Members shared stories of a faulty pay scale and little opportunity for advancement. Licensed social worker titles begin at grade 18 and can advance to grade 20. Meanwhile, psychologist 2s, who aren't required to hold a license, start at grade 23.

"We are highly trained," a member said. Sometimes social workers supervise and sign off on paperwork for psychologists, yet they are paid less, she said. "It's demoralizing."

Many social workers are also saddled with large student loans, sometimes living paycheck to paycheck when half their take-home pay goes toward skyrocketing rents. Coupled with the understaffing and complexity of their patient population, many social workers are burnt out.

One PEF member told Sen. Jackson she has had to consider moving on.

"I have a passion for this," she said. "But I have to leave what I love to get paid."

Members also shared with the senator the real impact of understaffing.

"My caseload is 230," a member said, and because of that, he can only see his patients once every two months. "It impacts the continuity of care."



Sen. Jackson urged social workers to tell their stories – to write personalized letters, which have more impact than a form letter, and to detail what they face and what they need.

“Keep pushing,” he said.

PEF members spent much of the day traversing the halls of the Legislative Office Building and the Capitol building, speaking to representatives who were in their offices and dropping off information for those they missed.

The information packets contained a summary of what PEF learned from a survey in October 2022 that focused on assessing working conditions and job satisfaction among social workers.

In the survey, more than 70% of the respondents indicated their work location had at least one vacancy; 85% admitted they have considered leaving state service; and 82% cited workload as the reason they considered leaving.

“It is clear that PEF social workers operate in dangerous environments with chronic vacancies and staff shortages, performing unmanageable workloads with an influx of severely mentally ill and difficult-to-serve individuals who have complex medical and treatment needs,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “We need our elected officials to do right by our social workers, so they can support New York’s most vulnerable citizens.”

PEF is asking legislators to:

1. Address salary inequity within the New York State Classification System of this female-dominated profession by reallocating the entire social worker title series upward to be on par with Psychologists based on the comparable duties, responsibilities, and required minimum qualifications of the titles.

2. Review the applicability of a Geographic Pay differential for the social worker title series.
3. Conduct Civil Service continuous recruitment examinations year-round.
4. Form partnerships with State agencies employing social workers (OMH, OPWDD, DOCCS, DOH, OCFS, OASAS, State Education and Worker’s Compensation Board) to provide training and oversight opportunities so they can receive their clinical designation.
5. Form partnerships with those same State agencies, plus the Office of Employee Relations, and the Department of Civil Service to provide healthy and safe working environments for employees in a more complex post-COVID-19 workplace. Available pathways include: Joint Health and Safety and Labor-Management committees, project advisory groups, and training and education programs. The goal should be to provide skills training, in addition to allowing for work schedule flexibility, such as remote telehealth options, and overall safer work environments by addressing occupational stress and burnout, and the assignment of manageable caseload sizes.
6. Incentivize social workers entering public service with student internships and financial aid.

[Read the full survey report here.](#)





Everyday PEF Heroines

PEF Statewide Women's Committee

Nominate a PEF Heroine

During Women's History month each March, PEF recognizes and celebrates members who have demonstrated significant accomplishments or leadership and have excelled and served as a role model to peers.

Women's History Month was established by Congress in 1987 to address the fact that, "the role of American women in history has been consistently overlooked and undervalued in the body of American history" and that to remedy this "the President is requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe such month with appropriate ceremonies and activities." (Public Law 110-9)

Nominees for PEF Heroines should demonstrate strength in at least one of these areas:

- Leadership
- Service and community engagement
- Key characteristics of a leader
- Committed to diversity, equity and inclusion
- Continued support of union values

All current PEF members may nominate PEF Heroines. Nominations will be accepted until March 31. The first 100 nominees will receive a Rosie the Riveter button and certificate. The winners and nominees will be announced in the April issue of the PEF Communicator. Winners and members who nominated them will be notified of the results.

[Click here to submit a nomination.](#)



Labor in the News

President Spence weighs in on workforce crisis

With a looming shortage of more than 12,500 state workers, the governor's budget calls for investing more than \$18 million in programs to boost the lagging workforce.

PEF President Wayne Spence was quoted in an Albany Times Union article on the state of the state's workforce: "PEF is very pleased that Gov. Hochul advanced a concrete plan to rebuild the state workforce to ensure the continued efficient and effective delivery of all state services." PEF will testify before a joint budget hearing about rebuilding the State Workforce on March 1.

[Click here to read more.](#)



Tesla workers in New York start union campaign

Tesla employees at a facility in Buffalo announced their plans to unionize with Workers United Upstate New York in the latest labor challenge for CEO Elon Musk.

If the union drive is successful, it would be the first for Tesla, which has avoided unionization at U.S. facilities, despite the fact many major automobile manufacturers have unionized plants in the U.S.

[Click here to read more.](#)



Dorm resident assistants want to unionize

Resident assistants who work in the dorms at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy are unionizing.

Seventy-six percent of the resident assistants signed petitions to form a union, which is enough to allow the union to form without an election if RPI agrees. If the college doesn't, there will be an election, most likely in the spring.

[Click here to read more.](#)

What impact could the Governor's proposed budget have on seniors?

March is the month that we transition from winter to spring. It's also when the New York state budget is negotiated. Retirees have a stake in these negotiations; therefore, I have focused this article on senior concerns identified by the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans (NYSARA).

The proposed state budget was presented by Gov. Kathy Hochul on February 1. In a recent NYSARA Monday Alert, the overall view of labor on the budget was presented in a letter by New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilentio. The following Monday Alert analyzed the parts of the budget that may impact seniors and is included below.

Indexing of minimum wage

NYSARA believes this should have already been done when we lobbied, with success, for the increase to a minimum wage of \$15/ hour. This is important to seniors as upward of 40% of people over the age of 65 are still in the workforce, many working minimum wage jobs, so by increasing minimum wage we increase the money going into the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. By indexing the wage to inflation, the minimum wage will never fall behind the rate of inflation.

A comprehensive \$25 billion housing plan that assists seniors

This plan will create or preserve 100,000 or more affordable homes across New York, including 10,000 with support services for vulnerable populations. The plan includes:

- \$1.5 billion for the creation and preservation of housing with supportive services.
- \$1 billion for new construction of multi-family affordable housing.
- \$450 million to preserve existing multi-family rental housing that strengthens existing affordable housing statewide and allows individuals and families to remain stably housed.
- \$300 million for senior housing specifically to help older New Yorkers age in place safely and in homes that meet their health needs in the communities they love.



- \$250 million for electrification funding to improve energy efficiency in low-income housing units.
- \$200 million to preserve public housing outside of New York City, which often serves the lowest income seniors and New Yorkers.
- \$35 million dedicated to support the Eviction Prevention Legal Assistance Program, which helps ensure that legal counsel is available to low- and moderate-income tenants to defend against eviction.
- \$35 million to support the state's Homeowner Prevention Program.
- \$36 million will go to the NYS Affordable Housing Corporation to increase homeownership opportunities.

Additionally, the governor proposes that we build on the state's status as the first in the nation to officially receive the age friendly designation from the AARP and World Health Organization. She pledges that New York state will:

- Ensure access to aging services and high-quality long-term care.
- Revitalize emergency medical services and medical transportation.
- Expand health insurance by raising the eligibility for Medicaid to 138% of the federal poverty level.
- Commit to recruit and pay the home care workforce and address transportation barriers.
- Strengthen the long-term care ombudsman program.
- Provide alternatives to nursing homes.
- Address the nutritional needs of older adults because 1 in 4 adults over the age of 60 and living at home is considered nutritionally at risk.

- Regulate pharmacy benefit managers to lower prescription drug costs to New Yorkers.
- Increase programmatic and regulatory efforts to prevent elder abuse and fraud.
- Lower taxes on middle- and lower-income people and increase benefits to older adults.
- Wave the income cap on retired teachers to encourage them to come back to teaching to address the teacher shortage.
- Expand NYSOFA partnerships that bring virtual programs into the homes of older adults to combat isolation.

"All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today." -
Unknown Author



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Letters to the Editor

Why aren't members masking?

To the Editor:

I am deeply disappointed every time I see photos from a PEF event where almost no one is masked. COVID-19 is still causing death and disability around the world. Much of the messaging from government officials says that individuals should protect themselves. Aside from the lack of scientific basis for this sentiment, unions are supposed to be about workers protecting and supporting each other. The whole idea of unionization is that we can do more together than as individuals.

By refusing to do even the bare minimum to lower COVID-19 risks, union leadership is sending the message that disabled workers and workers with vulnerable loved ones are not welcome. No one should be asked to choose between their health and having a voice in the union. Insistence on in-person events effectively silences our voices.

There are certainly ways to make gatherings safer, but they require us all to work together. Couldn't we at least try?

Marion Brown
Niskayuna

Editor's Note: *Members are welcome and encouraged to wear masks at events and meetings if they or their family members are vulnerable to COVID-19. With the lifting of mask mandates, PEF no longer requires masking. Should state or county public health guidelines change, we will adjust our policies accordingly.*





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.

- LaShon Boyd is an habilitation specialist 1 at the Metro Developmental Disabilities Services Office in Manhattan.
- Brian Cellery is an information technology specialist 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
- Kimberly Ernst-Harris is a supervising offender rehabilitation coordinator at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision central office in Albany.
- 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.
- Roxeen Mundy is an information technology specialist 2 at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
- Melissa Pine is an underwriter 1 at the state Insurance Fund in White Plains.
- 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.



February 6, 2023

Hundreds of members and New Yorkers stopped by the #PEF booth at the NYS Winter Fair in Syracuse, learned about what PEF members do for New Yorkers, signed the Fund Our Future petition, and overall had a very good time!



February 18, 2023

The first full day of the annual Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus conference got started in Albany, with PEF President Spence participating in a panel discussion about diversity in civil service.



February 23, 2023

A shout-out to members of PEF Division 180 at the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, who got together to learn about license and tuition reimbursement, how to fill out POA and MOT forms, and the union's Fund Our Future campaign! Pictured, left to right: PEF Nurse Organizer Nora Higgins, Council Leader Vinny Cicatello, Assistant Council Leader Dr. Alex DoNascimento, and Steward Scott Balsano.





February 14, 2023

PEF Social Workers are proudly wearing their stickers as a sign of solidarity, on this social worker lobby day organized by National Association of Social Workers.



