



10,000 Voices United

Massive Fund Our Future Petition Unfurled at the State Capitol

April 2023 • Volume 41. No. 3

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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



Waiting on the budget, progress at the table

The April issue of *The Communicator* hits your in-box as State lawmakers and the governor inch closer to a budget deal. PEF has pushed for [our priorities](#) every step of the way, culminating in an event last week where we unfurled a vinyl reprint of our Fund Our Future petition down dozens of steps in the well of the Legislative Office Building. If you missed it, [check out the video we posted on PEF Facebook](#). Forty-two feet long and 52 inches wide, the petition contained the names of nearly 10,000 New Yorkers who signed it in solidarity with our [campaign](#).

A week prior to that event the [PEF Executive Board held its first quarterly meeting of 2023](#) in Syracuse. I was proud to swear in six new Executive Board members at the start of the meeting and hope that many of you will consider getting involved in your union. Whether you start as a steward or want to represent a broader constituency, there are many opportunities for you to have a direct impact on the working conditions you and your colleagues experience. Petitions are available starting April 10 for the next Special Election. Be sure to check the [PEF Elections page](#) for openings and instructions.

I know many of you read *The Communicator* for the monthly [contract updates](#), and we have a thorough one in this issue. The 2019-2023 PS&T Collective Bargaining Agreement has expired and both PEF and the State have now put all their proposals on the table. While PEF requested extensions of various negotiated benefits while we work out a new deal, the State declined, and a few programs have “sunset” as a result. Any member eligible for a 5-, 10-, or 15-year longevity payment this month; however, can rest assured that those will be paid on time. You can read the [full details in this short summary](#). The Contract Team has some hard work ahead of them and I know they can count on your support. As negotiations heat up, keep an eye on your personal e-mail and PEF social media for ways you can show your solidarity and project the union strength we’ll need to secure a fair contract. If the union does not have your personal email on file or if it has changed, [please visit this page](#).

Finally, my congratulations to this year’s [PEF Heroines](#), nominated throughout Women’s History Month in March by their co-workers for their leadership, service and commitment to union values.

As always, thank you for all that you do.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President



Executive Board approves 2023-24 budget, gets PS&T contract update, and votes to send out Albany County Probation agreement for ratification vote

By KATE STICKLES

The Executive Board approved the 2023-24 budget, voted to send the Albany County Probation tentative agreement to the agency's membership for ratification, and discussed legislative and contract updates at its March 23 and 24 meeting in Syracuse.

Budget highlights

Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue presented a \$41.4 million proposed budget, with a total net projected annual revenue increase of \$2 million, offset by increased expenditures due to inflationary pressures on many expense items such as lodging and food, as well as increases related to staff salaries and benefits.

"I wanted to present to you a balanced budget based on anticipated revenues and anticipated expenditures that was fair to all and fair for all," Donahue said. "Our total dues income increased by over a million dollars, and I want to thank Divisions, Organizing and Field Services for their hard work. We increased our membership by about 1,500 from the last fiscal year and that is great, but at the same time, things are getting more expensive."

The three largest expenses break down to 47.6% for union leave, salaries, taxes, and benefits; 23.7% toward per capita and affiliation fees; and 10.6% for operating expenses.

Donahue also submitted for approval an amendment to the 2022-23 budget that balanced out increases in staff travel, office supplies, utility, janitorial and security expenses, computer fees, insurance, arbitration fees, and temporary hires, by using funds originally allocated to Employee Organizational Leave.



Six new board members were sworn-in at the start of the two-day meeting: Tanya Oliver, Stephen Powers, Christopher Jordan, Tamara Martin, Mamadou Diallo, and William Ferguson.

Both the 2023-24 budget and the 2022-23 amendment were approved by the board.

Contract programs set to sunset

The state finally passed some full-language proposals across the bargaining table at negotiations March 21 and 22, allowing the two sides to begin bargaining in earnest now that the 2019-2023 Collective Bargaining Agreement has expired.

"With both sides having proposals on the table, we are hopeful that we can now move forward with the more extensive, hard bargaining necessary to reach an agreement," said Contract Team Chair Darlene Williams.



Williams reported the state denied extensions of several provisions of the contract that sunset when it expired, and no decisions have been made on others.

“Most contractual items do not sunset,” said Williams. “Health insurance benefits; performance advances, which are coming out in April; performance awards or longevities, for which we eliminated sunset language in the last contract. Also, grievance and arbitration rights pursuant to articles 33 (discipline), 34 (contract grievances) and 17 (out-of-title grievances).”

The following programs sunset March 31 and extensions have been denied:

- A pilot program allowing unused convention days to be used for other employee organizational leave.
- The enhanced worker’s compensation benefit for parole officers (injuries incurred April 1 and after are not covered).
- A \$500 lump sum for seasonal employees at Parks and DEC.
- The \$500 special assignment duty pay (members will get April 2023 payments, which are based on 2022).
- The Article 14 Quality of Work Life Program.

As of July 1, 2023, the Over-40 Comp Time Program will sunset, after which employees will not have the option of being compensated for overtime with comp time credits instead of overtime pay.

No extensions have yet been granted for some sections set to sunset Dec. 31, 2023, including joint committees and programs such as Article 9 (Joint Committee on Health Benefits), Article 10 (Work-Life Services Programs), Article 14 (Professional Development and Quality of Work Life Committee), Article 15 (Professional Development Committee), Article 18 (Health and Safety Committee), Article 27 (Reimbursement for Property Damage), and Article 42 (Career Mobility Office).

“Article 15 includes several programs that provide significant direct reimbursement for to our members, including the College Tuition Reimbursement Program, the Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement Program, and the Certification and Licensure Exam Fee Program,” Williams said.

The same goes for the Productivity Enhancement Program, or PEP, which allows employees to use a set amount of accruals as a credit toward their employee share of health care premiums and state contributions to Dependent Care Advantage Accounts.



PEF leaders were honored for their involvement in the First Book program, distributing books to kids in residential facilities. From left to right: Leticia Rivera, Indermattie Balkaran, Bernadette O'Connor and Mohan Radhakrishna.

Albany County Probation contract

The board approved sending to members for ratification [a tentative six-year Albany County Probation agreement](#), retroactive to Jan. 1, 2022, containing no givebacks. For the first time since County Executive Dan McCoy took office, members would be getting more than 2% raises across the board – with this contract locking in two years at 2% and four years at 3%.

“This is the best contract Albany County Probation has ever seen,” said Council Leader Tricia Drautz. “This is a reminder of all the work we did during COVID. We never stopped working for the community and we never stopped working for you. We are proud to be the lead for all other county contracts. I’ve been here 16 years and I have never seen a contract like this before.”

In addition to the salary increases, the contract includes a one-time lump sum bonus of \$3,000 – a first for Albany County Probation; added language to ensure probation assistants at Step 20 who are promoted to probation officer start at Step 3 instead of Step 0; and a new salary step for certain employees reaching 20 years of service.

Following ratification by the membership, the agreement must be approved by the Albany County Legislature before it goes into effect.

New Divisions



The board approved the creation of two new Divisions that will be made up of employees at the Office of Cannabis Management.

There are currently 49 hires in PEF Region 8 and 14 in Region 10, with the expectation that there will be significantly more as the hiring process actively continues.

The next Executive Board meeting will take place June 7-9 in Albany.



PEF leaders unfurl 42-foot-long petition at the Capitol, urging leaders to Fund Our Future

By KATE STICKLES

[Four-feet wide and 42 feet long, the petition](#) PEF rolled down the steps of the Legislative Office Building March 29 was a striking visual with a powerful message: 10,000 New Yorkers agree, it's time for the state to invest heavily in the state workforce and in public services.

"A functioning democracy depends on the essential work of public employees, who deliver the services we all use every day – from public education to affordable health care, transportation, safe streets, green spaces, and so much more," said President Wayne Spence. "As lawmakers and the Governor finalize the state budget, we have been working with them to make sure that budget reflects the needs of our membership, and of the people of New York."

In 2020, PEF launched the [Fund Our Future campaign](#), a coalition of union and community leaders committed to making the case for reshaping government in our public interest. The campaign's tenants are straightforward: privatizing public goods such as social services runs contrary to the public interest in maintaining the common good; people have a right to transparency regarding how their government funds services that benefit everyone; everyone must pay their fair share for public services; and we must safeguard our public investments by ensuring a strong system of public inspection and audits.

The petition urged legislators to:

Use Tax Dollars for the Public Good: End the wasteful practice of paying thousands to contractors to perform work that public employees can do for half the cost;

Improve Staffing and Essential Health Care for the Most Vulnerable New Yorkers: Cease closing group homes at OPWDD and rebuild public services so all New Yorkers can efficiently and effectively receive care when required;

Reinvigorate the Civil Service System: Offer more frequent Civil Service exams to attract workers and improve pay equity across the State.

At the unfurling, legislators stopped by to offer their support, including Senators Shelley Mayer, Michelle Hinchey, John Mannion, Robert Jackson, Toby Stavisky, and Jim Tedisco, and Assemblymembers Dana Levenberg, William Conrad, Aileen Gunther, Marianne Buttenschon, Edward Gibbs, Alex Bores, Josh Jensen, Manny De Los Santos, Pat Fahy, Harvey Epstein, Deborah Glick, Chantel Jackson, Brian Manktelow, and Karen McMahon.

You can read some of their [comments here](#).

"We must continue to create pathways to the middle class by growing state jobs with competitive salaries, benefits, and an attractive pension plan," said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio. "We have to fix Tier 6 so the skilled state workers we already have stick around and so new hires have an incentive to make state service a long-term career."







Full-language PS&T contract proposals are on the table; some contract programs set to sunset

The state finally passed most of their full-language proposals across the bargaining table at negotiations March 21 and 22, allowing the two sides to move into a more productive and intense phase of negotiations.

"With both sides having proposals on the table, we are hopeful that we can now move forward with the more extensive, hard bargaining necessary to reach an agreement," said Contract Team Chair Darlene Williams.

The state denied PEF's request to extend several provisions of the contract that ended when it expired on April 1, 2023. However, the state did agree to extend the Article 33 (disciplinary) pilot programs allowing for expedited suspension review and virtual hearings.,

"Most contractual items, including many very important ones, do not sunset," said Williams, such as health insurance benefits, performance advances -- which will be paid to eligible members this month -- and performance awards or longevities, for which we eliminated sunset language in the last contract. Also, grievance and arbitration rights pursuant to Articles 33 (discipline), 34 (contract grievances) and 17 (out-of-title grievances), don't sunset."

The following are some programs that did sunset on March 31, 2023:

- A pilot program allowing unused convention days to be used for other employee organizational leave.
- The enhanced worker's compensation benefit for parole officers (injuries incurred April 1 and after are not covered).
- A \$500 lump sum for seasonal employees at Parks and DEC.
- The \$500 special assignment duty pay (members will get April 2023 payments, which are based on 2022).
- The Article 14 Quality of Work Life Program.

As of July 1, 2023, the Over-40 Comp Time Program will sunset, after which employees will not have the option of being compensated for overtime with comp time credits instead of overtime pay.

No extensions have yet been granted for some sections set to sunset on Dec. 31, 2023, including joint committees and programs such as Article 9 (Joint Committee on Health Benefits), Article 10 (Work-Life Services Programs), Article 14 (Professional Development and Quality of Work Life Committee), Article 15 (Professional Development Committee), Article 18 (Health and Safety Committee), Article 27 (Reimbursement for Property Damage), and Article 42 (Career Mobility Office). "Article 15 includes several programs that provide significant direct reimbursement to our members, including the College Tuition Reimbursement Program, the Workshop and Seminar Reimbursement Program, and the Certification and Licensure Exam Fee Program," Williams said.

The same goes for the Productivity Enhancement Program (PEP), which allows employees to use a set amount of accruals as a credit toward their employee share of health care premiums and state contributions to Dependent Care Advantage Accounts.

While PEF can offer no definitive guarantees regarding the reinstatement of these provisions that expired or are due to expire later this year, the union historically has negotiated the retroactive reinstatement of such provisions. In addition, the Contract Team is focused during this round of negotiations on eliminating many of the sunsets moving forward, including PEP and Article 15. The goal is to build upon the success the union had in the 2019-2023 contract when the sunset was eliminated governing performance awards or longevity pay.





Scenes from the Statewide Nurses Committee conference held March 25 in Syracuse.

Nurses meet to discuss staffing crisis, health and safety, workplace violence

More than 30 nurses attended the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee (SWNC) Conference March 25 in Syracuse, covering everything from legislative and budget bill updates, to health and safety and workplace violence, to the work the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is doing with its [“Code Red”](#) staffing crisis initiative.

AFT’s Health Issues Assistant Director Haley Quinn presented the staffing crisis workshop and discussed “Code Red: Understaffing = Patient Care Crisis,” a \$1 million multi-faceted, multiyear campaign involving more than 100 AFT affiliates who will focus on the issue of inadequate staffing and hold health care corporations and the government accountable through education, outreach, advocacy, contract bargaining and legislation, according to the AFT [website](#).

The campaign actualizes the recommendations of the AFT’s landmark “Healthcare Staffing Shortage Task Force Report,” released in November 2022, which found nurses and other healthcare professionals are exhausted, burned out, anxious and leaving the profession in droves. You can learn more about the [campaign here](#).

“We learned a lot and we had meaningful discussion on the state of nursing in New York, as well as AFT’s Code Red campaign,” said PEF Nurse Coordinator Nora Higgins. “It’s critical that we work to address health and safety, workplace violence, and short staffing so that we can protect both our nurses and our patients.”

Nurses who attended the conference had the opportunity to obtain three continuing education credits (CEUs). One of the programs offered this year, “Critical Incident Stress Management,” was particularly helpful, Higgins said. The speakers closed out the session with soothing techniques nurses can use to calm themselves during situations that are, or can become, out of control.

President Wayne Spence attended the conference and offered words of support to PEF’s nurses.



“The pandemic highlighted your hard work and your unwavering dedication to your patients,” he said. “We saw firsthand the devastating impact short staffing has on not just nurses working long hours and excessive overtime, but also on the patients. Along with AFT, we are on a mission to address this crisis and we will continue to fight for legislation and meaningful change.”

The [SWNC](#), chaired by Amy Pacholk and co-chaired by John Traverne, is a representative body that advises PEF’s Executive Board on all nursing-related matters. The committee lobbies for legislation beneficial to the profession, analyzes legislation and industry trends as they pertain to the profession, and constantly advocates for nurses and their patients.



PEF Heroines excel in leadership, service, and support of union values

For the third year in a row, during Women's History month in March, PEF recognized and celebrated female members who have demonstrated significant accomplishments or leadership. Members were asked to nominate women in the union's ranks who have demonstrated at least one of the following qualities:

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

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) In his 1987 proclamation, President Ronald Reagan stated: "I call upon all Americans to mark this month with appropriate observances to honor the achievements of American women."

The following PEF members were honored and recognized. Included below their title and agency is a quote from the individual who nominated them.

Leisa Abraham

Psychologist 2, OPWDD

"Leisa is a hardworking, dedicated leader who is there for the membership. She sees a problem and tackles it head on. From standing up with members who were being bullied to organizing a regional women's committee, to spearheading a Fund Our Future video day with the School for the Blind, she is always at the ready to promote union values and needs."

Scarlett Ahmed

Supervising Labor Services Representative, DOL

"An incredible unionist who has influenced many, including me. I love talking union, social justice and life in general with her. Scarlett has great values and ethics. I'm proud to call her my sister."

Lisa Balistreri

Developmental Disabilities Program Specialist, OPWDD

"To say she goes above and beyond her job description is an understatement, especially given the trying times of COVID and the challenges that are still to come with rebuilding our post-pandemic services and team. She advocates for the needs of our population tirelessly and assertively handles any challenges or conflicts that accompany this."

Sarah Bradley

Research Scientist 3, DOH

"She is such an inspiration as a scientist and as a supervisor. She is selfless and kind and empowers others to be the best that they can be."

Jennifer Bradt

Registered Nurse Supervisor 1, OPWDD

"Whether it's with work or with the union, she is always willing to help and jump in to take on a leadership role. Jen works as a nurse administrator for OPWDD, but she has taken on different roles in the union to represent the nurses under her. She serves on the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee and makes sure to keep everyone up to date on what's happening with nursing issues."

Catherine Dell'Angelo

Employee Retirement System Examiner 5, OSC

"Catherine has been a role model to all union leaders - past and current - and serves as a fighter for future leaders to look up to. Catherine stands up for what is right, regardless of adversity, and empowers women to stand up for what they believe in. I owe my strength and tenacity to her and I'm thankful that I had such a strong role model to look up to early in my career."

Karen Hockey

Registered Nurse Supervisor 1, OPWDD

"She takes the time to listen to everyone and has worked to take Sunmount nursing in a better direction."

Lynne Kuber

Teacher 4 OCFS

"Lynne goes above and beyond to meet the needs of Brookwood's residents. Each day she visits all the wings and checks in with kids to ensure their educational program aligns with their Special Education accommodations as well as their progress toward graduation. She recognizes their birthdays, brings her guitar around to serenade them and generally does what she can to keep everyone's spirits up and the stress down."

Elizabeth Murray

Registered Nurse 1, OPWDD

"Beth has always been curious about union activities. She has been the division leader now for less than a year and has jumped right into this leadership role. Members have quickly become comfortable coming to her for help and if she doesn't have the answer right away, she finds out how to get it. She makes the members in the division feel supported."

Tiffney Nerkowski

Registered Nurse Supervisor 1, OCFS

"She's a phenomenal supervisor and PEF steward in our facility. She cares about the staff and the health and safety of our youth, going above and beyond her roles and responsibilities."

Bernadette O'Connor

Recreation Therapist, OMH

"Bernadette serves as trustee and chair of the PEF Membership Benefits Program. She has been, and is committed to, ensuring that PEF members have relevant and quality benefits for themselves and their families. Bernadette has been instrumental in suggesting new and exciting benefits for exploration."

Tanya Oliver

Teacher 4, DOCCS

"Tanya took on a very difficult division with no stewards. She has worked hard to make sure that members know who she is and spent a lot of time trying to help with their issues. Tanya has always gone above and beyond in support of all of us in PEF. She has made sure to include us in all that is happening and kept us up to date on the next chapter."

Amy Pacholk

Registered Nurse 1 Teaching Research Center, SUNY Stony Brook

"She is a valued member of the union, standing up for all its members and wanting the highest quality for the members and the patients we care for. She is always standing up for nursing. She has demonstrated how to be a leader."

Kristie Pound

Licensed Master Social Worker 2, OMH

"Kristie took on a division whose stewards all just quit. She quickly jumped into her leadership role, learning as fast as she could. She started having member meetings, which hadn't happened in years, and went out to meet members in faraway outside locations. I was with her, and they all commented how no one had come to visit them before."

Angelina Rodriguez

Information Technology Specialist 2, SED

"She is courageous and committed to representing members. She puts herself out there and tirelessly works to advocate for us."

Michele Iorfida

Senior Case Manager, Roswell Park

"Buffalo has been in the spotlight in 2022 because of a mass shooting, a blizzard, and an earthquake. Michele has demonstrated strong leadership skills in assisting PEF members in whatever their needs may be. Her leadership needed to be diverse, culturally sensitive and trauma informed. She is to be applauded for exceptional work to the membership."

Allison Szokoli

Registered Nurse 1, OCFS

"Allison is an amazing nurse who has begun yoga classes with our female residents, introducing incarcerated youth to healthy ways to manage stress. She truly is a gem."

Darlene Williams

Occupational Therapy Assistant 2, OMH

"Darlene is a powerful woman and a role model."



April performance advances hit paychecks April 26, May 4

If you are on the administrative payroll, your April 2023 performance advance (increments) base salary change is effective March 30 and will be reflected in your April 26 paycheck; if you are on the institution payroll, your performance advance is effective April 6 and will be reflected in your May 4 paycheck.

Details regarding eligibility for these payments can be found [here](#).

This is different than the previously outlined performance awards (lump sum longevity payments) which will be reflected in the April 20 (institution) and April 26 (administrative) paychecks.

Details regarding eligibility for the performance awards (lump sum longevity payments) can be found [here](#).

Please direct any questions about any of these payments to your PEF Field Representative.



Elizabeth Murray

This is part of a series of Q&As with Union leaders across the state. If you have a suggestion for a profile, please email communicator@pef.org.

How long have you been a PEF member?

I have been a PEF member for eight years.

Briefly summarize what you do for the people of New York.

I am a Registered Nurse 1 for the Finger Lakes Developmental Disabilities Service Office (DDSO) caring for individuals with developmental disabilities in two state-run homes.

What positions do you hold in PEF?

I am the current Division Leader for Division 201. This is my first year holding this title and being as actively involved in the union as I am. I attended PEF Convention in October 2022 in Niagara Falls and really learned a lot more about what the union does for our members. Most recently I attended our Leadership Conference and gained more knowledge on ways to communicate with and advocate for members in my Division and Region. I have been able to educate members on our Membership Benefits programs, the ongoing contract discussions and have helped fellow nurses better understand the title re-allocation process that recently occurred. I have also been able to sign up several members for COPE. (PEF's voluntary fund for federal lobbying.)

I have had great training and guidance from Shelby Wisneski, Regional Coordinator for Region 2, as she previously held the role of Division leader. I have made several connections with other PEF members and officers that I would not have had the chance to make



if I were not in my current position. I feel the union work and mission is important and I am glad to be a small part of that work and helping to see the mission through.



PEF closely monitoring Executive Budget proposals

PEF's Legislative Department has analyzed the so-called "One-House" budget bills released last week by the State Senate and Assembly for the impact they will have on PEF members and the services they provide. The proposals encompass education, labor, family assistance, public protection, general governance, health and mental hygiene, transportation, and economic development.

"PEF is thankful for the work of the governor, the Senate and the Assembly on their respective budget proposals," said President Wayne Spence. "We will be monitoring and lobbying throughout the conference committee and final budget making processes to build upon our priorities. We are at a critical stage of the budget process, and we strongly encourage PEF members to write their legislators in support of our budget priorities."

[You can access pre-written budget letters here.](#)

The legislature supports several general governance bills that reflect PEF's Fund Our Future campaign, including:

- \$2 million to establish 12 regional civil services offices to administer testing and onboard state workers.

- \$2.3 million to create a multilingual "Public Service Matters" campaign aimed at helping recruit the next generation of state government leaders. This initiative would reach a broader, more diverse audience and strengthen outreach to difficult-to-fill and high-need titles.
- \$2.2 million to develop a job evaluation system that will review the statewide civil service structure for all titles to ensure they meet the needs of employers, align with the job market, consider pay equity and level the playing field with the private sector. PEF is lobbying to raise all state salaries by a minimum of two grades. PEF knows that many titles will require higher adjustments to attract and retain needed staff.

In health and mental hygiene, both legislative chambers and PEF support establishment of registration and reporting requirements for nurse staffing agencies, and all three oppose transferring oversight of health care workers from the State Education Department (SED) to the Department of Health. PEF asserts that professional titles should be established and regulated by independent professional boards of peers under SED, which is insulated from gubernatorial influence.



Both houses also support funding to open 1,000 inpatient psychiatric beds, part of a multi-year plan to increase operational capacity at mental health facilities. The proposal would add 850 currently offline inpatient psychiatric beds at public hospitals and 150 new state-operated inpatient beds.

Bringing these beds online is critical to meet the demands of a mental health crisis and PEF asserts that taxpayer dollars should be directed to expanding capacity at state-operated facilities.

The Assembly includes children's beds in the legislation and allocates \$5 million to hire mental health professionals at 12 addiction treatment centers. The Senate adds an initiative to expand addiction services for people with mental health needs and disabilities and modifies the language to include reporting requirements to notify the legislature before residential, community, and state-operated beds are opened.

PEF continues to fight for increased Office of Mental Health (OMH) funding and to combat the shuttering of Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) facilities, especially in the wake of nine recently announced closures.

Both houses also dedicated significant additional funding to support SUNY hospitals, which are facing economic uncertainty.

"PEF is thankful to both houses for these proposals and will be working to ensure that the SUNY hospitals get the funding they need to continue to deliver quality health care services in their communities," Spence said.

The union remains committed to improving the Tier 6 pension plan, including standardizing a 3% employee contribution at 10 years. While these changes were not included in either of the one-house bills, PEF will continue to work to try to get these needed changes included in the final budget agreement, which is expected at the end of this month.



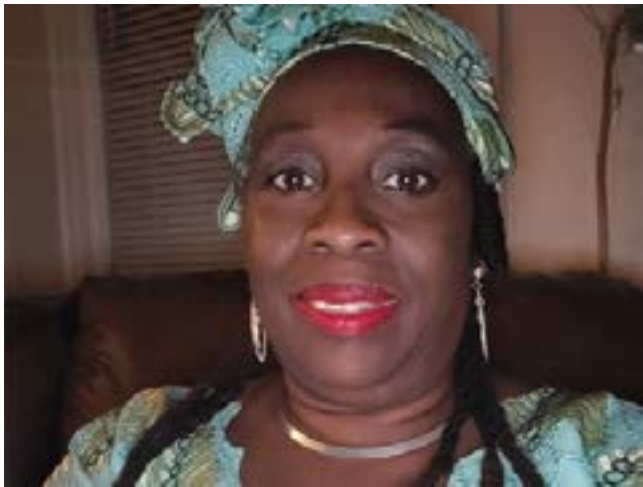
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Honoring community, union service during Women's History Month

In honor of Women's History Month in March, PEF is featuring three union members who are going above and beyond in their union and their community. These women are dedicated to educating, serving, and protecting their coworkers and their neighbors.



Suzette Grant
Executive Board
Department of Financial Services
Manhattan

Following in her parents' footsteps, Suzette loves to help her neighbors. With a daughter who is an RN, she empathized with nurses during the COVID pandemic, and put together and distributed gift packages to show them people appreciated their dedication and their sacrifices. During the PEF Convention in October 2022, she made packages for breast cancer survivors in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Suzette also volunteers with her church at area homeless and women's shelters, providing food, personal hygiene products, and more. At Christmas, she participates in a breakfast and a toy giveaway at a family shelter. She also participates in a civic organization that raises funds to support the schools in her hometown of Guyana, South America, and every Christmas they provide a stipend to villagers who have reached the age of 70 and anyone who is disabled, regardless of age.

"Giving back to the community is in my blood. My parents were always giving and doing for people in the community. As long as there is a need, they would step in and try to fill it. I like to give."



Tamara Martin
Council Leader
Law Department
Manhattan

A firm believer that there can be no quality of life without good public safety, Tamara is passionate about fighting gun violence and getting illegal guns off the streets to improve public safety in her community. A former New York Police Department auxiliary sergeant, she has worked with the NYPD to improve community relations and has served on public safety community boards and committees. Tamara serves as a PEF council leader, Political Action Committee chair for Region 10, and is newly elected to the Executive Board. She is passionate about connecting her members to community resources and education. She hosted a deed theft presentation for Regions 10 and 11 to educate members on the little-known danger to homeowners and she is an advocate for affordable housing, especially in the New York City area. Tamara believes everyone should have an opportunity to thrive, especially union members and public sector workers who give so much to their communities.

"My passion is really against gun violence and getting illegal guns off the streets to improve public safety. You could have a great job, a good education, kids in a good school, but if you don't have public safety, nothing else matters. I'm also trying to bring a passion for community service into the union. I am always looking to partner with outside organizations to benefit our members; to educate and give them resources."

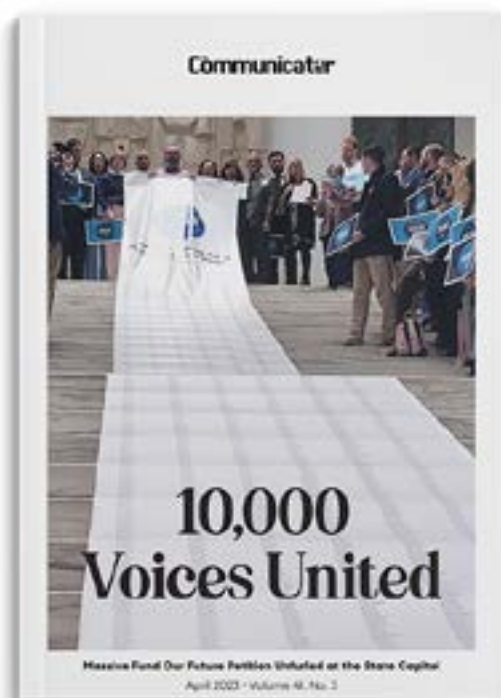


Shelby Wisneski
Regional Coordinator
OPWDD Finger Lakes DDSO
Elmira

As the Region 2 coordinator, Shelby has worked tirelessly to mobilize and reach as many of her members as she can. In a vast rural region, Shelby has made it her mission to bring the union to the members, some of whom have never met a union representative in person. She recruited new Stewards and Executive Board members and is working on encouraging members to attend the PEF Convention. Shelby has plans to bring PEF Membership Benefits to Region 2 and visit multiple locations to educate members on what's available to them. Shelby's passion extends beyond her union advocacy.

The need for blood donation resonates with Shelby, whose husband Richard required transfusions before he passed away in 2021. In his memory, she planned a Red Cross blood drive, hosted by Region 2 and a nearby United Steelworkers local. Members from both unions turned out to donate and there are plans for another drive in June.

"I'm passionate about getting people involved. With the Red Cross, I know the need for blood is great. With PEF, I want people to have a relationship with the union, not just pay their dues and only talk to someone when they have a problem. I think it's important for members to get involved at whatever level they are comfortable with and to realize that their voice matters."



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PEF secures new benefit for state employees who park in non-state garages and lots

Do you drive to work and park in a lot or garage not operated by New York State? Thanks to PEF's 2019-2023 Collective Bargaining Agreement, you can now set aside pre-tax funds to help offset the cost of that parking. PEF members on the Joint Multi-Union Work Life Services Advisory Board played a lead role in securing the benefit.

The benefit will be added to the NYS-RIDE program and the vendor administering the program, Edenred, will email all current NYS-RIDE participants this week with complete details. The maximum amount

you can have deducted from your paycheck before taxes is \$280. Payroll deductions for the parking benefit are expected to begin in late April or early May and the benefit will be available for use in June. Members with questions should consult their HR or personnel office.





PEF Special Election April 2023

Three contested Executive Board seats were filled following the January 2023 special elections. William Ferguson was elected to Seat 55, representing certain members at Economic Development; Tamara Martin will fill Seat 255, representing certain members at the Law Department; and Mamadou Diallo was elected to Seat 535, representing certain members at the Department of Transportation.

There are 11 seats up for election in April 2023:

- 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 173, ITS
- Seat 290, OPWDD
- Seat 295, OMH
- Seat 395, OMH/OPWDD
- Seat 545, Political Subdivisions of NYS

Petitioning begins April 10 and ends May 2. If you've ever wanted to have more of a voice in your union, Executive Board is a great opportunity to shape the policies and agenda of PEF. After the petitions are collected and eligible candidates are determined, ballots will be mailed May 23 and must be returned by June 14. Petitions will be available at www.pef.org/elections on April 10.



Unions helping unions: PEF travels to Montana for member engagement drive

By KATE STICKLES

PEF members and organizers recently joined the Montana Federation of Public Employees Workers (MFPE) for a week of door knocking, worksite visits, and rallies to engage their members.

Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger, Trustee Bruce Giddings, Organizing Director Dan Carpenter, and Region 1-5 Organizer Andrew Puleo joined PEF's fellow AFT local to get their members to turn out for eight rallies across Montana on March 4.

The joint effort knocked on 1,069 doors; held 101 membership meetings; assessed 751 employees; and signed up 240 new members.

"We were letting members and potential members know that any national effort to unify and engage with new and existing members displays the enormous unity in which we stand," said Giddings. "This display signifies more than just union power and strength. It symbolizes a forged relationship with each other."

MFPE members joined PEF during the [membership blitz](#) last year in Albany, an impressive effort that brought together unions from several states. The volunteers reached nearly 1,200 members at 39 worksite meetings and blitzers knocked on 840 doors of members and potential members in New York's Capital District over the course of four evenings.

Bridger, whose Region encompasses the Capital District, said it's important to go out and help other unions grow their membership in the face of well-funded anti-union efforts.

"They showed up in full force to help me grow our membership," she said. "We want to make sure we go back out and help other unions and create coalitions against anti-union forces. We're doing what we've always done, putting boots on the ground."

Unions are trying to save individual jobs, improve working conditions, and secure better pay and benefits for members. With anti-union movements throwing money around, it's more important than ever for unions to stick together.

"We need to make sure that we save ourselves," Bridger said. "We're working together to make this work. I felt like I was surrounded by people that no matter what I did, they were always going to pick me up and help me. Working together; money can't buy that."

Fledgling state labor unions can learn a lot from PEF.

"Just as PEF is able to gain further strength from our parent unions, such as AFT and SEIU, we can offer experience to other newly formed state labor unions," Giddings said. "The personal relationships and connections I've made with other union activists have been very enriching and valuable to me."

"The experience was once in a lifetime for me," he said. "To be able to travel to Montana and Colorado was a hugely appreciated gift."

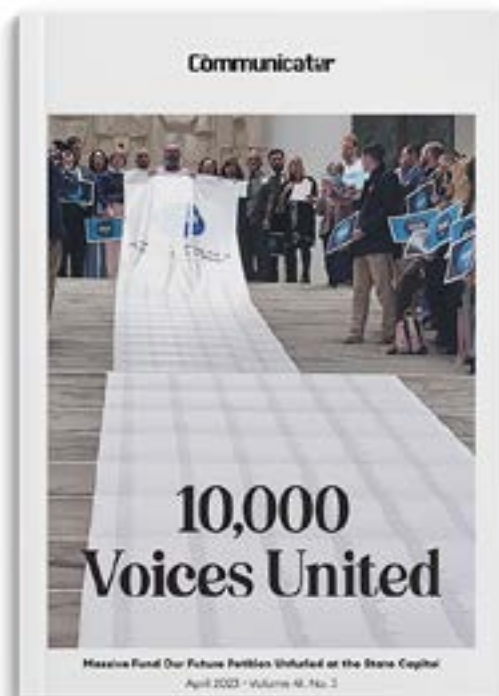




PEF Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger, left, poses with her MFPE Team in Billings.



PEF Organizing Director Dan Carpenter, left, takes a selfie with his MFPE Team in Helena.



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Respect us, protect us, pay us: Social workers call for much needed change to recruit and retain staff

By KATE STICKLES

"We are inundated with so much paperwork, it's not leaving us enough time to actually meet with our patients."

"The workload has increased tremendously. A lot more paperwork and unfortunately a lot less time with the patients."

"Therapists formerly had 60 patients on a caseload and that was considered full. Today, that caseload is 80, which makes it impossible for therapists to properly care for our patients."

Does that sound repetitive? That's because it is. Those are just some of the responses PEF social workers gave in a recent survey of their profession. And now they're standing up and saying it's time for change.

Their rallying cry is a simple but profound slogan used by PEF parent union, SEIU: "Respect Us, Protect Us, and Pay Us."

Getting to the bottom of the matter

As a social worker for the Office of Mental Health, Elaine Vasilopoulos watched as she and her coworkers sat on the sidelines while psychologists, psychiatrists, and nurses received raises to close pay gaps and recruit and retain staff.

They wondered why they had been excluded when they face the same issues.

"I started to do some research on social work employment and jobs and what was going on," Vasilopoulos said. "I know a lot of people were leaving jobs at my facility and we started asking them why they were leaving."

"We looked at LinkedIn and we saw places are paying a lot more than New York state and the benefits are similar," she said. "New York state has been under the impression they paid better and had better benefits. That's not what we found."

As they continued their research, it became apparent just how dire the situation is.

"We started realizing there is going to be a much bigger problem going forward if this isn't rectified with better pay and better recognition," Vasilopoulos said. "There is a nationwide shortage of social workers and it's predicted to get worse."

Social workers aren't just asking to get paid more – they are asking to be paid fairly. A psychologist 2, with a Master's in psychology and no license, can be supervised right out of school by a social worker with

a clinical license. Three years later, that psychologist 2 automatically becomes a Grade 23. Their previous supervising social worker? Stuck at Grade 20.

Armed with more information, Vasilopoulos and a team of fellow social workers worked with PEF and the New York State chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to survey members and write a 21-page analysis about the results and the crisis facing their profession.

In October 2022, PEF surveyed 935 of its Licensed Master Social Workers to assess working conditions and job satisfaction. Of that, 279 members completed the 20-question survey.

The results are telling.

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. Low pay, high stress, and increased workloads were the top three reasons cited by survey respondents for why they have considered leaving the profession.

We can't afford to lose them

Social workers treat the whole patient and are unique in that approach. They go beyond just providing therapy or discharge from the hospital.

"We treat the patients holistically," Vasilopoulos said. "When we discharge them, we don't just let them go, we make sure they have somewhere to go, continued services, that they have food, electric. When you lose social workers, you lose that holistic support for those patients."

At a recent lobby day in Albany organized by NASW, one man working in the prison system said he had 238 patients on his caseload. He could only see patients once every other month.

"How is he going to be able to help that population?" Vasilopoulos said. "Teenage suicide and depression are going up. The number of social workers is going down. How are you going to address that problem?"

[Click here](#) if you would like to send a letter to agency management and your local legislators about these issues.

[Click here](#) to access the PEF report: "Crisis in Care: High stress, low pay impact New York State-employed social workers."





PEF members who work across the state as social workers, helping New Yorkers access critical care and services, share in this social media video why they love the work they do and what New York must do to make sure they can retain and recruit skilled social workers.





Former CDPC council leader Mary Haltermann passes away

Former Executive Board member and Division 231 council leader Mary L. Haltermann [passed away March 12](#), after a long illness.

A staff pharmacist at Capital District Psychiatric Center (CDPC) before her retirement in November 2021, Haltermann was proud of her work as a PEF union leader, and she fiercely defended her members.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Haltermann helped secure much-needed masks from PEF and advocated for her members, who were being mandated and redeployed to other units as the facility attempted to fill staffing gaps. Her members were suffering burnout and morale plummeted. Haltermann worked with PEF to fight the Office of Mental Health hiring freeze and redeployments.

Mary shielded her illness from her friends, not wanting to trouble them. She was physically and mentally steadfast and truly had a heart of gold. She will be missed by her many friends.

Prior to her state employment, she was a pharmacist at Honeyland Pharmacy and Ellis Hospital in Schenectady and was very proud of her work at Sterling Winthrop in Rensselaer and of achieving several degrees and her pharmacy license.

No services will be held. Fond memories and expressions of sympathy may be shared with her family at SimpleChoicesCremation.com.

President Biden goes to bat for retirees with his 2024 budget

President Biden wrote an op-ed in the New York Times March 7 to showcase his plans to protect and preserve Medicare, and he released the administration's complete budget proposal for fiscal year 2024 on March 9.

The budget tackles two of the most pressing issues for current and future retirees: lowering prescription drug prices and adding 25 years to the solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund; it pays for it by asking those with annual income above \$400,000 to pay a little more into Medicare.

"The plan lowers out-of-pocket costs for seniors who need high-cost drugs by expanding the Medicare price negotiation that was introduced in the Inflation Reduction Act," said Richard Fiesta, executive director of the Alliance for Retired Americans. "Capping older Americans' generic drug costs for chronic conditions at \$2 will also help seniors pay for necessities like food, housing and energy."

The budget calls for a 10% increase — \$1.4 billion — over the 2023 enacted level for the Social Security Administration (SSA) to invest in staff, information technology, and other improvements. The funds would improve customer service at Social Security Administration (SSA) field offices, state disability determination services, and teleservice centers.

In addition, the plan invests \$150 billion over 10 years to improve and expand Medicaid home and community-based services, such as personal care services, to allow seniors and individuals with disabilities to remain in their homes and stay active in their communities while improving the quality of jobs for home care workers. Even with those much-needed investments, the budget will reduce the deficit by nearly \$3 trillion over 10 years.

We urge Congress to take this proposal seriously and reject proposals that will lead to cuts to Medicare, including raising the eligibility age or further privatizing the system.



We have seen runaway inequality over the last 40 years which allows some politicians to attack Social Security and the best way to fight inequality is with UNIONS. Unions raise the wages of working people, meaning less for the millionaires and billionaires, and more for everyday people. This, in turn, strengthens the Social Security trust fund. I applaud President Biden's Budget proposal which, if enacted, will cut the deficit, tax the rich and fund needed programs for the middle class. It's also time for Congress to pass the Pro Act and support unions.

"Unions Built the Middle Class."



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
- Gloria Broadbent is an instructor at the School for the Deaf in Rome.
- Brian Cellery is an information technology specialist 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
- Megan Dolan is a vulnerable persons protection specialist 2 at the Justice Center in Delmar.
- 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.
- Tammi Holtslander-Camp Sr. is an occupational therapist at Greater Binghamton Health Center in Binghamton.
- Cassandra Mascaro is a gender violence prevention specialist 1 at the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence in Albany.
- 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.
- Kevin Valazza is a teacher 4 at Wende Correctional Facility in Alden.
- 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.





March 15, 2023

PEF Does It! Gov. Hochul toured the Emergency Operations Center March 14th during the storm and greeted PEF members at the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services - Office of Emergency Management. Left to right: Brian Farley, Rebecca Wilburn, Sara Swingruber, and just behind Sara's head, that's Div. 179 Council Leader and Executive Board Member John Thomsen! Thank you for doing your part to keep New Yorkers safe!



March 23, 2023

The quarterly PEF Executive Board meeting in Syracuse had six new board members sworn-in at the start of the two-day meeting. Welcome to E-Board Tanya Oliver, Stephen Powers, Christopher Jordan, Tamara Martin, Mamadou Diallo, and William Ferguson!



March 15, 2023

Congrats to the 27 PEF health and safety leaders who earned their OSHA-30 designation after two days of training in the NYC office. New York State worksites will be safer places because of you!



March 25, 2023

PEF was on hand at the multi-union rally to fund SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn!



March 24, 2023

Thanks to the PEF Statewide Women's Committee for screening the Indie Pop Up Lens film "Storming Caesar's Palace" at the Executive Board meeting in Syracuse in celebration of Women's History Month. The film tells the story of Ruby Duncan and the activists who took on the Las Vegas mob in their fight for a basic income guarantee.



March 31, 2023

PEF Region 2 Leaders Regional Coordinator Shelby Wisneski, VP Randi DiAntonio, PEF Organizing and PEF Membership Benefits Program visited agencies at 6 different locations including OPWDD, DOCCS, DEC, OMH, DOT, DOL, and DOH. Leaders spent the week meeting with members, updating them on union priorities, and making sure members know what benefits they're entitled to as PEF members!



March 29, 2023

PEF Division 304 (OPWDD) gathered at the Region 4 office for union updates!



March 23, 2023

Please join PEF Division 196 in welcoming aboard new members at today's New Employee Orientation at Roswell Park. These members also checked an Activity Box on their Membership Applications!



March 16, 2023

Happy Purim from the PEF Jewish Committee, which celebrated this evening with members at the Regions 10/11 office in New York!



March 31, 2023

As Women's History Month comes to an end, a photo from this week's event in the NYC office hosted by the NYC Women's and Hispanic Committees and featuring guest panelist Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz. Thank you for a great discussion about women in labor!

