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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



A toast to 2023 and cheers for 2024!

Happy Holidays to the proud public employees of PEF! I cannot believe it has been a year already, but what a year it has been! This is our annual double-issue to say goodbye to 2023 and ring in 2024 and it is jam packed with stories.

First, we have a [look back on the major union achievements this year](#), from the overwhelming ratification of the 2023-2026 PS&T Contract, to legislative and organizing victories. We also have a couple of recent successes to celebrate. After almost three years of hard work by a lot of people, members and staff alike, [PEF and New York agreed on a plan to compensate civil servants who worked overtime during COVID that was underpaid](#). This was a victory for civil servants across the State, but make no mistake, PEF led the way. It was PEF that filed the lawsuit that led to this settlement, and it was PEF who kept the pressure on the State to come up with a fair calculation that rewards members for the sacrifices they made to keep New York running when a lot of workers were quarantining at home. I congratulate everyone involved. Wins like this truly show the value of our union.

We also have extensive coverage of the [first PEF/State Joint Health & Safety Conference since 2018](#) in this issue. More than 200 PEF leaders and members along with scores of State managers gathered in Saratoga Springs from Dec. 11-13 to share best practices and attend workshops with one goal in mind – revitalizing Health & Safety committees at all levels in order to make New York State workplaces the safest they can be. I was able to attend a portion of the conference and it was wonderful to see PEF members and managers interacting and getting to know one another outside of work. As I said in my speech, health and safety concerns do not discriminate, so it's vital that labor and management work together so that everyone in a workplace is protected.

2024 marks the Centennial Celebration for one of New York's most treasured resources – its state parks and historic sites. We [look ahead at what's planned](#) and back at the [labor history that's been made in some of the nation's state parks](#).

Finally, a tip of my PEF cap to my executive assistant, Susan Marr. When the Capital District Area Labor Federation reached out to see if PEF wanted to participate in their effort to [fill a Teamster's truck with food donations](#), she jumped on the chance to set up a collection bin at union headquarters and PEF ended up donating six boxes worth of canned and dry goods to feed the hungry. Thank you, Sue!

And thank you, PEF members, for all that you do for this State and this union. It was another amazing year and I'm already looking forward to what we'll do together next year. I wish you all a restful and healthy holiday season.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President

PEF had something to celebrate every month of 2023!

Pulled from our Communicator stories throughout the year, here's a roundup of union achievements from the past year. One thing they all have in common? They wouldn't happen without the support and solidarity of PEF's 50,000+ members across the State. Thank you for being part of this union and serving your fellow workers every day of the year.

January: Successful contracts and pay reallocations

The PEF Roswell Park Contract Team and management from Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center (RPCCC) agreed to reallocate the salaries of the more than 680 PEF nurses employed by the facility in Buffalo. Recognizing that nurses have historically been undervalued and compensation is key for retaining and attracting skilled nurses – PEF-represented nurses created a petition and gathered more than 750 signatures demanding Roswell increase nursing pay grades and base salaries to better match the education and skills required for their jobs.

Outstanding turnout at the Albany Labor Day parade played a significant role in the strong contract secured for members at Albany County Probation. The six-year agreement contained no givebacks and a 16% raise over six years.

February: Telephone Town Hall outlines PEF priorities

At the start of the year, a telephone town hall was held to address the challenges of negotiating PEF's 2023-2026 contract, the union's legislative agenda, membership engagement plans, and much more. Members heard from PEF President Wayne Spence, Contract Administration Director Debra Greenberg and chief negotiator Mark Richard. They detailed the strategy the negotiating team hoped to pursue and assured members that their priorities, as revealed by an all-member survey, were being brought to the table. This town hall set the tone for the rest of the year, as PEF delivered one of its historically strongest contracts.

March: PEF social workers lobby for pay reallocation, improved working conditions

PEF social workers participated in a Capitol Day of Action in Albany, joining forces with mental health professionals from the New York chapter of the National Association of Social Workers to lobby legislators. Their advocacy laid the groundwork for a salary reallocation request, as more than two dozen PEF social workers called on State lawmakers to address pay inequity, unsustainable caseloads, and short staffing. The issues experienced by social worker titles are familiar to many PEF members – with the root cause being chronic understaffing.

April: Unfurling PEF's Fund our Future petition

The names of 10,000 New Yorkers were laid out on the steps of the Legislative Office Building on March 29, 2023. PEF rolled a four-foot wide, 42-foot long petition down the steps to deliver the message: It is time for the state to invest in the state workforce and public services.

The petition – signed by thousands of members and concerned New Yorkers at events around the State from 2021 to 2023 -- called on legislators to use tax dollars for the public goods improve staffing and health care and reinvigorate the Civil Service system.

Many elected State officials came out in 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.

May: Investigating Transparency, PEF wins FOIL Case

PEF's Civil Service Enforcement and Research Department is working on identifying and addressing barriers to promotions that may affect minority PEF members across the state. To that end, the department sought to get information from the state Department of Civil Service that details ethnic and racial details from 2010 to 2022. That information should have included agency and jurisdictional class information.

When the state responded with missing information, PEF appealed and later pursued an Article 78 proceeding on October 7, 2022. The Albany County Supreme Court ruled on April 17, 2023, that PEF was entitled to the full account requested in the initial FOIL request.

Following the ruling, President Spence said: "We are pleased the judge agreed with our position and we look forward to continuing in our efforts to combat racial injustice and discrimination."

June: Executive Board overwhelmingly votes to send contracts to members for ratification

PEF Did It! The Executive Board voted to send the PS&T and Canal Corporation tentative agreements to members for ratification. Governor Hochul praised PEF for achieving great benefits for its members and the work those members do to help New Yorkers all across the State.



July/August: PEF members overwhelmingly ratify PS&T contract

PEF members turned out in force to ratify the 2023-2026 Professional, Scientific, and Technical bargaining unit contract, with more than half of eligible members returning their ballots, and an overwhelming 95% of those members voting “yes.”

The ratified contract delivers some well-earned financial gains – including a \$3,000 signing bonus, 3% raises each year, retroactive to April 1, 2023, a \$400 dental stipend while the State works to replace the inferior EmblemHealth plan, and a first-of-its-kind Higher Education Differential, which starting in 2024 will provide a \$600 annual payment to PEF members with college degrees or professional licenses administered by the State Education Department.

September: Big turnout at Labor Day events; governor signs major labor bills into law

PEF members turned out in force for Labor Day events across the state and helped make the New York State Fair a success, and Gov. Kathy Hochul signed several labor bills championed by PEF, including expanded notice requirements for Civil Service exams, protection for workers who refuse captive audience meetings, and increased penalties for wage theft.

October: PEF holds 45th annual Convention in Syracuse

Nearly 600 delegates journeyed to central New York for the union’s annual convention, where the State and Federal Legislative Agendas are set for the following year and PEF policy is debated and voted on. The most influential and powerful leaders in the labor movement addressed the body: National AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, SEIU President Mary Kay Henry, AFT President Randi Weingarten, and NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento.

President Wayne Spence highlighted in his State of the Union address the myriad ways PEF made a difference in the lives of its members and how that membership continues to grow. “I can remember standing here in 2018 and 2019, after the Janus decision, talking about emergency plans to keep this union intact if members quit in droves like the Supreme Court gave them the opportunity to do,” President Spence said. “We welcomed 5,389 new members from January 1 to September 21. In a union of 50,000, that’s 10% growth. Our goal was 2,500 for the whole year: that’s 216% better than our forecast.”

November: PEF takes the lead on AI and the workforce

Artificial intelligence in the workplace is not going away, which is why PEF demands to be at the table helping shape the way it is used in public-sector workplaces. Members from the Office of Information Technology Services educated a joint hearing of the State legislature on the need for regulation and protocols.

“AI has and will affect everyone’s lives and livelihoods and have a profound impact on our members and the services they provide to the State of New York,” PEF Executive Board member Christopher Ford told the panel. PEF recommended to the panel that we need complete transparency when it comes to the data AI uses to power its algorithms and that the testing and oversight of AI be ongoing, especially to protect data privacy, security, and copyright.





Conference brings together PEF, management to focus on health & safety

By KATE STICKLES

When COVID shut down much of the world, it also had a devastating impact on PEF's health and safety committees at worksites and agencies across the state.

Hopefully, that's about to change.

For the first time since 2018, PEF and the State held a joint Health & Safety Conference from December 11 to 13 in Saratoga, bringing together management and labor for three days of workshops, guest speakers, and more.

PEF Article 18 Co-Chairs Conrad Davis and Leisa Abraham welcomed attendees and talked about their plans for the coming year.

"Many worker protection programs were born out of the devastating Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911," said Davis. "Unions were a big part of that fight for safety on the job. But we can't do it alone – labor and management need to partner to get things done. We are here to support you and to make sure that you have all the resources you need to get your local Health and Safety Committees up and running."

Abraham urged attendees to take full advantage of what the conference had to offer.

"It can be overwhelming if you don't know where to start," she said. "Like many of you, I am also a new health and safety chair, and I am

excited about the programs you will be attending here – make the most of it!"

PEF Director of Health and Safety Geraldine Stella gave an overview of the program.

"We are here because COVID decimated our local Health and Safety Committee network," she said. "This conference program was built around giving you the tools you need to rebuild. Our plenary sessions will help you identify where you have committees, where you need them, and how to recruit for them."

"Our workshops cover everything from basic health and safety committees, workplace violence programs, how to work with different generations, active shooter training and more," Stella said. "Our theme is 'Health and Safety Superheroes – Stronger Together! You are the next health and safety superheroes.'"

President Spence kicks off the night

President Wayne Spence said the world has changed since the last time management and PEF leaders gathered for this conference.

"When we were here last time, we did not know the term COVID," he said. "How the world has changed. Who would have imagined we'd be here talking about training how to deal with an active shooter? It's now become a part of life. We have to evolve. We must come together."

Spence told a story from his own past that illustrates how vital it is to pursue change.

"My partner and I were taking a parolee into detention and she was pregnant. A corrections officer started screaming, 'Why is a pregnant officer bringing a person into my jail?' He said, 'Get her out of here,'" Spence recalled. "When I say she was pregnant, she was very pregnant. Her vest barely covered her stomach."

They ended up calling in another officer to handle the transfer, but Spence said the corrections officer schooled him in how corrections handles pregnant officers. It made an impact and Spence took it upon himself to begin researching the issue in the parole division. One thing he found striking: water amplifies sound. So, when you fire a gun around a pregnant woman, the fetus is exposed to not just the gunfire, but amplified gun fire.

"What do you think was happening when a pregnant officer was going to the range?" he said. "We must have ear protection when we go to the range. That fetus doesn't have ear protection."

He got involved with his local Health and Safety Committee in the Parole Division and took the issue directly to management. "The PEF Health and Safety Department guided me on how to fight for safety on the job." Taking his research up the chain, to legislators and the media, he finally saw change when he reached the commissioner. "Don't accept no," he said. "Let's not wait for change, let's do action."

Spence also recognized the more than 60 state managers in attendance.

"It is just as important for management representatives to work in a safe environment as it is for PEF members," he said. "I'm told that more managers signed up for this conference than ever before. That's a tribute to you and the realization that we must work together to ensure that every worker is protected on the job."

Guest speaker talks Long COVID

President Spence welcomed [New York State Insurance Fund \(NYSIF\)](#) Executive Director and CEO Gaurav Vasisht to the podium to talk about NYSIF and its commitment to researching Long COVID.

Vasisht noted that NYSIF's study of Long COVID ties directly to its public mission to protect workers and its deep roots in labor.

"NYSIF emerged from tragedy," Vasisht said, referring to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911, "in which 146 workers perished – mostly women, mostly girls, mostly immigrants." The fire, noted as the worst factory fire in the history of New York City, led to the enactment of the New York State law that created NYSIF.

Earlier this year, NYSIF published the result of a study analyzing its COVID-19 workers' compensation claims data. The analysis found that almost one-third (31%) of COVID claimants met the report's criteria for Long COVID.

"We realized we had access to information – the data – that could help piece together a more meaningful picture of this very puzzling condition," Vasisht said. "[We studied more than 3,000 established COVID-19 workers' compensation claims. What did we find?... Most fundamentally, Long COVID is real.](#)"

Additional findings indicated that some workers returned to work within 60 days but were still receiving treatment. Others were unable to get back to work for more than a year. Some, like women and older adults, were more likely to develop Long COVID, as were those with comorbidities and those who had been hospitalized because of the severity of their COVID infection.

"The implications are vast," Vasisht said. "They involve individuals and households. They involve employers of all geographies and sectors. And they involve the labor market and the economy at large." This leads to unemployment, loss of income, medical skepticism, stigma, and loss of productivity. It also warrants a further review of how Long COVID may be depressing the labor participation rate," Vasisht added.

"There's a lot of work to be done," he said. "There's so much to learn about Long COVID."

Employees also need to understand when they should file claims and how to do it. [PEF offers information on its website to help members navigate the system.](#) Stella said PEF does not get notified when a claim for workers' compensation is filed and urged PEF members to contact the union at healthandsafety@pef.org if they or their co-workers have been hurt on the job.

Following Vasisht's remarks, a panel of experts presented on workers' compensation basics. The panel included Robert Grey, Esq., Managing Partner for Grey and Grey LLP, a law firm that represents injured workers, Workers' Compensation Ombudsman Joe Cavalcante and Civil Service Specialist Vincent DePaul, along with Ed Cottrell from the New York State Office of Employee Relations and Geraldine Stella from PEF.

Roundtable discussion – Superhero Teams - Tools for Successful Partnerships

A panel of state and union leaders continued the discussion, talking about best practices for successful health and safety committees.

The panel featured Leisa Abraham, Psychologist, Finger Lakes OPWDD, PEF Article 18 Co-Chair; Conrad Davis, Auditor, Tax & Finance, PEF Article 18 Co-Chair; Ed Cottrell, Office of Employee Relations (OER), Article 18 Co-Chair; Lindsay Bonanza, Teacher, Mohawk Correctional Facility, Article 18 Committee member; John Greening, Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Safety and Health Director; Bob Rafferty, Office of General Services (OGS) Director, Health, Safety, and Security; Bryce Therrien, Office of Mental Health BER Assistant Director and Multi-Union Health & Safety Committee Co-Chair; Geraldine Stella, PEF Health & Safety Director; and Mark Stipano, CSEA Industrial Hygiene Specialist

Cottrell said cooperation between management and labor is vital to a safe and healthy workplace.

"Management can't be everywhere," he said. "Bringing items to their attention benefits everyone. No one is on an island and collaboration can only benefit the agency." He added "We may agree to disagree, but we always have the utmost respect for PEF."

Bonanza pointed out that even when labor does bring issues to the table, they aren't always given proper attention.

she said. “We need to give it the importance it deserves. Part of it is that everyone is busy, doing more with less, and most labor/management meetings are contentious. Very often the attitude in the room is not positive by the time you get to health and safety.

“The health and safety of your workers should be No. 1,” she said. “We are striving to make this friendly and bring everyone together.”

Rafferty, from OGS, said many health and safety complaints he sees are physical plant and infrastructure-related and they are often specific to a location. Working with health and safety committees and management, his office tries to field all complaints for more than 60 state office buildings and the additional leases and associated landlords.

From OMH, Therrien said there is a lot of data available to bring to the table, such as SH900 reports, which are forms that the state uses to log incidents and injuries. “I use all the information I have,” he said. “You have to use it to make employees safer.”

The bottom line

Attorney Robert Grey of Grey & Grey, LLC, spoke about the importance of worker’s compensation when safety at work fails. Using a humorous meme-filled PowerPoint presentation, Grey pointed out the difficulties of navigating the worker’s compensation system and the high cost of worker injuries.

“Benefits are the same whether it’s the worker’s fault, the employer’s fault, a third party’s fault, or nobody’s fault,” Grey said. “Good safety and health programs are win-win for employers and workers.”

Grey’s firm was a Super Hero Sponsor of a networking hour for labor and management to get out of their silos and learn from each other.

“The topics for the conference are so important, but intense,” said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio. “It was great to have that time to network with other labor and management attendees, and Robert’s use of humor was a welcome way to break up some of that intensity while still driving home the safety message.”

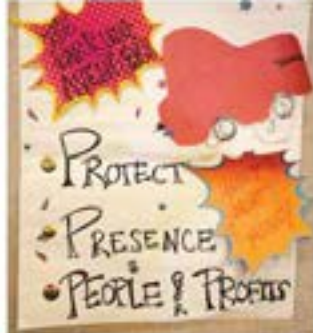
Putting the skills into play

On the final day of the conference, labor and management came together to tackle a health and safety issue using the Super Hero method they learned during two days of plenary sessions.

Attendees created a superhero alter-ego, including a name, power, and weakness. As teams, they created a team name, selected a health and safety issue to solve, brainstormed how to use the team’s superpowers to address the issue, and considered how to overcome the collective weaknesses.

The activity mirrors what a good health and safety committee in the workplace should look like and how it should function, using the strengths and understanding the weaknesses of committee members. Conference participants now have a steppingstone toward rebuilding (or building) their own health and safety committees.







PEF members, state managers take part in variety of health & safety workshops

By NAJEE WALKER

The 2023 Health & Safety Conference offered a variety of workshops for PEF members and state managers to hone their skills and learn new ones. From injury and illness reports to bridging the gap between generations, to active shooter training, attendees were offered workshops to provide them with critical tools for labor and management committees and in their work as advocates for health and safety on the job.

Long-COVID and workers' compensation

The Long-COVID and Workers' Compensation workshop combined the best practices on navigating the workers' compensation system in New York with ongoing research on "long-COVID," where people are plagued by prolonged symptoms of COVID-19.

Members steered the conversation specifically toward the role and relationships of the Workers' Compensation Board and New York State Insurance Fund (NYSIF).

Joe Cavalcante, an advocate for injured workers at the New York State Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), explained NYSIF's role as the insurance company making payments to injured workers. The WCB deals with disputes that come up during the process, including those that may require the help of lawyers.

Workers Compensation attorney Robert Grey, of Grey & Grey LLP, walked participants through the process for COVID claims. "The Comp system can be incredibly confusing for injured workers, especially when it comes to COVID claims," he said. "My job is to help you through that system and make sure you get the benefits you deserve."

Grey also discussed how to access medical care, and what happens if someone dies after being exposed to COVID in the workplace.

"There are significant benefits for families and heirs under the Workers' Comp law and your PEF contract," he said.

Cavalcante and Grey, along with Statewide Field Services Director Katie Vorwald, focused on making sure members have the right information, especially when it comes to the various benefits offered by Workers' Compensation and the PEF/NYS Contract.

The facilitators discussed the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19 as it relates to contracted COVID on the job. With long-COVID considered a consequential injury that occurs due to an initial COVID infection, Cavalcante suggested filing a timely COVID claim as soon as possible to preserve compensation coverage for potential long-COVID claims.

Article 13 of the PEF contract complements the Workers' Compensation law, including benefits around the restoration of any charged accruals, supplemental payments, and civil service law protections for being out of work while recovering from long-COVID.

Members interested in more information about long-COVID or Workers' Compensation are encouraged to reach out to PEF's Health & Safety Department at HealthAndSafety@pef.org, the Advocate for Injured Workers at AdvInjWkr@wcb.ny.gov, and Robert Grey, via the firm's [website](#).

Using walkthroughs to identify hazards

Walkthroughs are an important health and safety tool, giving PEF members a chance to see any potential problems at the workplace in real time, identify hazards, and hold employers accountable for mitigating them.

The Health & Safety Conference walkthrough workshop gave attendees a thorough overview of the best times to conduct walkthroughs and of the best practices. Regular walkthroughs by union representatives and management, especially with local or agency Health and Safety committees, are the best way to identify hazards and address them properly.

“Walkthroughs are part of the whole risk assessment process,” said Geraldine Stella, PEF’s Director of Health and Safety. “There are many factors that may lead to a walkthrough and what we find out there can be used to make real change in the workplace for safety.”

PEF recently conducted a walkthrough as part of an investigation into a member who was assaulted on the job at an Office of Children and Family Services facility. By doing so, the union was able to begin the process of making sure that any further risks to any members of the agency or facility are addressed.

Active shooter training

Active shooter incidents have sadly become a common occurrence in the United States.

Through the Active Violence Emergency Response Training—or AVERT—a training module designed to educate and bring awareness to active shooting incidents; members were given hands-on training in how to handle such situations. The module focused on giving workers the tools and skills to react properly during an incident, focusing on arming workers and members with knowledge rather than firearms.

The training module was split into two groups, each one using PEF trainers who are HSI-certified AVERT instructors, including PEF Health and Safety Director Geraldine Stella.

“We are grateful to Keith Wrightson and Brian Bisson from the American Federation of Teachers’ Health Issues Department for bringing this program to us. We have a team of certified AVERT instructors at PEF, and will be providing training across the state,” she said. “The PEF and NYS Article 18 Committee is also in discussions right now about funding this program, and the Conference was the perfect place to showcase the training as a joint labor and management project. We will be offering both direct training and Train-the-Trainer programs.”

Stella also noted that the AVERT training was a great addition to PEF Health and Safety Department trainings on workplace violence and emergency action plans. “Years ago we began training health and safety committees on how to advocate for bringing a program to their worksites, now we can offer it ourselves directly.”

“It is important to understand that you may not be able to prevent these incidents from happening,” Wrightson said. “But you can help yourself and your workplace by knowing how to respond.”

Proactive and reactive responses were highlighted in the training. Through both video and facilitated training, members were encouraged to do their best to recognize warning signs, use situational awareness and be aware of their flight or fight instincts and respond confidently.

The training focused on all aspects of an active shooter situation, including how to deal with potential injuries. Members were even given tourniquets and trained how to use them to stop bleeding.

A key aspect of the training focused on attacking, defending, and distracting the shooter. Participants learned how to block doors by stacking tables and chairs, and some techniques that can be used to disarm attackers.

“Some people have the first instinct to run and get away from the attacker, some people have the instinct to fight back immediately, others freeze up entirely,” Wrightson said. “We are trying to educate you to always run, but to know what to do when it may be difficult to run.”

Many members expressed gratitude for the training, especially as many of them were involved in active shooter incidents themselves.

All of the workshops offered at the conference are available through the PEF Health and Safety Department. For more information or to schedule a training for your agency, at your workplace, or at your next membership meeting, visit the [PEF Health & Safety pages on the PEF website](#), or contact the Department at HealthAndSafety@pef.org or 518-785-1900, ext. 254.





Keynote speaker Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq., addresses the audience during the 2023 Health and Safety Conference in Saratoga.

Workers' Comp Board chair discusses respect, solidarity with unions

By KATE STICKLES

On the second day of the 2023 Health and Safety Conference, keynote speaker Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq., shared her lifelong respect for the labor movement, the importance of labor and management communications, and her commitment to continue fostering cooperation with unions in her role as chair and commissioner of the New York State Workers' Compensation Board (WCB).

Her experiences growing up part of the so-called "working poor" - working long hours from the age of 15, experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace, and being paid unfair wages as a waitress - helped her recognize the value of unions.

As a member of DC37, her father's wages were meager, but would have been more so had he not been in the union. Those wages allowed him to save money to bring his children and wife to the U.S. and still provide for others in the Dominican Republic.

"He hadn't had an easy life, growing up dirt poor," Rodriguez said. "He didn't have much of anything to his name ... but he did have one thing - a job - a good union job," Rodriguez told conference attendees. "I share my life story so that you may see in me someone who understands the importance and vital role that labor unions play in helping to lift up workers, and the sole reason we enjoy the gains and rights in the workplace we have today."

The WCB administers several insurance laws, including workers' compensation, disability benefits, and Paid Family Leave insurance, and PEF members make up a large portion of the staff.

"I'm deeply proud and appreciative of the Board's many unionized employees, including our 517 PEF members, comprising over half the agency's total workforce," she said. "We have PEF members in every Board division and nearly every unit."

At the start of her tenure as chair of the WCB, turmoil and labor protests greeted her, and she quickly learned that engaging with labor in meaningful ways was the only way to combat public perception of government as the enemy.

"We've slowly turned things around, establishing a good working relationship with our unionized brothers and sisters based on trust and mutual respect - something that is critical in reducing workplace illness and injury and ultimately moving the needle on just public policy," she said. "We have so much untapped common ground and I believe deeply that our interests are, and should be, aligned on most issues - and especially those of health and safety, and employee wellbeing."

Rodriguez has made it her mission to form strong partnerships with labor unions and bring them to the table for dialogue with her executive team.

"My executive director and I also make it a point to attend PEF and CSEA labor-management meetings when we can, to discuss anything from health and safety issues to staff morale; all in an attempt to create more cohesion between workers and management at the Board," she said.

Her team is not just working at the table - they are also supporting PEF's mission to make sure workers who should file Workers' Compensation claims, do so.

"During the pandemic, our Advocate for Injured Workers and I embarked on an outreach campaign to educate workers and first responders across the state about their rights to file a workers' compensation claim if they believe they contracted COVID at work," Rodriguez said. "That remains true today."

Rodriguez continues to innovate ways to reach injured workers through worker advocacy groups.

"We hosted our very first worker advocate conference on May Day 2023, where PEF Health & Safety Director Geraldine Stella was a panelist -- and we're currently hoping to work with the New York State AFL-CIO and PEF directly to revamp the WC Navigator program in 2024."

For information on workers' compensation, click [here](#) or email HealthAndSafety@pef.org.



Award recipients make invaluable contributions to health and safety in the workplace

PEF members were honored for their contributions to health and safety in the workplace at the 2023 PEF/State Health & Safety Conference December 11 to 13 in Saratoga. The recipients are listed below. For more details, [click here](#).

Judith Scanlon PEF Health & Safety Activist Award



Region 9 Coordinator Diane Jaulus received the Judith Scanlon PEF Health & Safety Activist Award.

Named for Judi Scanlon, an intensive case manager in Buffalo who was beaten to death in 1998 during a home visit to a patient, the award gives recognition to grassroots health and safety activists who fight for safety on the job and workers' rights.

Jaulus is a member of the DOCCS Statewide Health & Safety and Workplace Violence Prevention Committees and is passionate about fighting for Region 9 members and for DOCCS members across New York.

Bernie Kahn Outstanding Service Award



Region 3 Coordinator and Article 18 Co-Chair Leisa Abraham received the Bernie Kahn Outstanding Service Award.

Named for Bernie Kahn, who chaired the PEF Health & Safety and PEF Article 13 Committees for many years, this award recognizes a health and safety activist for their sustained and outstanding efforts to improve the lives of workers.

Abraham recently took up the fight to put more safety measures in place for workers in high crime areas who are traveling to and from work. She has also built a powerful coalition with other advocates to coordinate safety controls that will benefit OPWDD and other Western New York facilities for years to come.

Agency Award



The Agency Award is given by the Office of Employee Relations and PEF to agency chairs who demonstrate dedication to health and safety; development of programs; model labor/management cooperation; and have an interest in new approaches to health and safety.

This year, the award went to the chairs of the Office of Mental Health Multi Union H&S Committee (OMH MUHS) – Darlene Williams and Bryce Therrien. The MUHS demonstrates how coalitions between unions and state agencies can work to make a successful health and safety program.

Kathy D'Arminio Special Recognition Award



Recognizing the life-long recontributions of individuals who have distinguished themselves through a career of hard work and dedication to improve the lives of workers, this year's Kathy D'Arminio award went to Matt London.

London was a PEF member at the Department of Health and heavily involved in health and safety before joining PEF staff during the fight for the Workplace Violence Prevention law and PESH Standard. He trained thousands of PEF members and others across the country over his long career. He is now the executive director of the newly formed Northeast New York Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health (NENYCOSH).

Chairs Special Commendation Award



The Article 18 chairs honored PEF staff member Shawn Bobb for his invaluable contributions to the PEF Health and Safety Department for more than 30 years.

Bobb helped get better protections on the job for PEF members and all public employees in the fight to pass and shape the Workplace Violence Prevention law and the Public Employee Safety & Health (PESH) standard and has been a leader in infectious disease and bloodborne pathogen injury prevention programs.



PEF takes action after series of workplace violence incidents

By NAJEE WALKER

PEF responded quickly in late October to an exploding situation at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Industry Residential Center outside Rochester, following several serious assault incidents over two days. PEF Health and Safety staff, regional staff, members, and the newly elected OCFS Statewide Health & Safety Committee chair met to discuss the events and plan the union's response.

In the course of several Zoom meetings, the group spoke with Industry staff members to piece together what happened, provide immediate support, and ask for what solutions they saw as necessary.

"PEF is currently investigating at least two events where members were seriously hurt," said Leisa Abraham, PEF's Region 3 coordinator and co-chair of the Statewide Article 18 Health & Safety Committee. "We are working to do everything we can to minimize the harm that can be done to our members."

Joseph Robinson, an Education Director at Industry, was one of the assaulted members. The attack broke his orbital bone and resulted in several lost days of work. He said he was just doing what he thought he should do when he was attacked. "When it was time to lock-in, one of the youths refused and resisted," Robinson said. "I used the proper restraints OCFS trained me on, but he did end up hitting me in response."

Robinson also said he believes that the youth who assaulted him knew that there were not enough staff working that day and there would be no rapid response. Still, Robinson said, he "was trying to be of use" to his fellow employees.

PEF's fact-finding mission following the incident revealed that there are several areas in the facility that frequently have incidents, and that more data is needed about the impact they are having on the youth held at facilities like Industry. Robinson's assailant is over 18, but there is concern that legal adults — up to the age of 20 — are being housed in the same facilities, some awaiting transfer to the Department of Corrections when they turn 21.

"The Raise the Age legislation has not been implemented in a manner that makes sense. Twenty-year-olds don't belong in the same treatment units with much younger peers," said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio during the November Zoom call. "We need to examine these admission decisions and ask legislators and OCFS how they will keep staff and the kids at these facilities safe."



PEF member Joe Robinson shared this photo of his facial injuries following the assault at OCFS Industry in Oct. 2023.

Raise the Age was signed into law by New York in 2018 despite PEF's objection. It changes the age at which youthful offenders can be held at OCFS facilities.

"While well intentioned, Raise the Age has led to serious unintended consequences," said DiAntonio, who chairs PEF's Statewide Political Action Committee. "PEF objected to the law's requirement to comingle young adults, ages 18-20, with younger adolescent residents, ages 10-17, due to the dramatic differences in physical, psychological and social development between them. Those differences create an environment ripe for bullying and abuse."

One thing was made clear in all the incidents: understaffing is a significant contributing factor that results in more assaults on staff as well as other youth in the facility. With no one to respond quickly to help Robinson or other staff when they need it, they are always at greater risk for more harm.

"We need to know what the agency or the facility management has done since the incident," VP DiAntonio said. "Staffing is a critical component to making the workplace safer but that will take time. In the immediate timeframe, the State needs to take actions that show they care. We will never solve the staffing crisis if employees, new or seasoned, are afraid they're going to get seriously assaulted when they come to work."

Since the incidents, a PEF team conducted a walkthrough of the facility and met with local and agency management representatives to help develop a plan of action for long- and short-term solutions.

“The agency and facility need to focus on proactive preventive actions,” said PEF Field Representative Colin Phillips. “We especially need the facility to create an emergency response team and a new response protocol. The current model was not designed to provide care for residents over the age of 18.”

PEF is currently in talks with management to discuss changes to procedures and provide more clarity on the day-to-day impact on laws like Raise the Age. There are other short-term proposals including providing Personal Protective Equipment and better emergency communication equipment for use during dangerous and aggressive situations.

“The walkthrough was just the beginning of really good dialogue,” Region 3 Coordinator Abraham said. “I am confident that there will be strong long-term solutions the more we work with management and start statewide talks.”

Additionally, PEF is working with CSEA, since workplace violence potentially impacts everyone at a facility.

“We have serious concerns with the inadequate compliance with the Workplace Violence Prevention Standard at Industry,” said PEF Health and Safety Director Geraldine Stella. “Union and management representatives need to do a workplace violence post incident review after serious incidents such as these in order to determine what needs to be in place to prevent or mitigate future incidents. PEF was not included in that review and that needs to change.”

“One of the main stumbling blocks is that a number of titles that need to be staffed are not just PEF titles,” said Phillips. “Youth Support Specialists are CSEA titles. PEF members are doing out-of-title work to cover short staffing in another bargaining unit. PEF members who work as teachers or therapists do not spend as much time in direct contact with residents and may not always be aware of subtle conflicts or other factors between youths that can put both staff and residents at risk.

Robinson appreciates PEF’s response so far but recognizes that there is still more work to be done.

“I think everyone is doing the best they can here at Industry,” Robinson said. “Many of our more experienced veterans have retired or left the job, and that leaves more inexperienced staff to deal with an even more challenging clientele.”

While PEF, CSEA, and management work on solutions to ensure better workplace safety, Robinson and other members say they will continue to work together and do their best to take care of the youth in their care and stay safe while doing it.

Any member interested in getting involved with workplace violence prevention at their agency or facility should contact PEF Health & Safety at HealthAndSafety@pef.org.





PEF delivers a prescription for health care workforce success at legislative hearing

By **NAJEE WALKER**

New York State's health care sector is experiencing a staffing crisis. The Department of Health projects a shortage of 40,000 nurses by 2030. The state is also experiencing staffing vacancy rates between 30-40% and turnover rates exceeding 25%.

It's a recipe for disaster and the reason why state lawmakers and concerned parties, like PEF, are seeking solutions.

During a legislative hearing held at Hunter College in Manhattan on Dec. 19, PEF Statewide Nurses Committee Chair Amy Lee Pacholk prescribed one fix.

"We need to invest more in front-loaded loan forgiveness programs that reward individuals for taking on this work and to help them earn the education they need to do it successfully," said Pacholk, who works as a teaching nurse at SUNY Stony Brook. "PEF believes that these workers should be given immediate loan relief in exchange for meeting their work requirements."

Pacholk's testimony centered on the future of the industry. Retention is already difficult as wages and other benefits struggle to keep up with the private sector. Recruitment, however, is equally important.

"We need to fortify and invest in our SUNY teaching hospitals and expand their health care course offerings," Pacholk told the panel of legislators. "We need to expand enrollment in these schools so that our health care professionals look more like the communities that they serve."

PEF's priorities to combat short staffing include increases and changes to compensation and a fix to the Tier 6 pension plan.

After decades of lobbying by PEF and other unions, New York's registered nurses received a salary reallocation in 2022. But Pacholk pointed out that while compensation is slowly catching up, pay for travel nurses is still almost three times the salary of other full-time nurses. She advocated for another increase and to include nurse practitioners this time.



"We should also end the lag payroll system," Pacholk said. "It is antiquated and really hurts the state's competitiveness for talent. In this labor market, trained, licensed health care workers considering state employment can't fathom that they won't receive a full check for their work for up to 14 weeks."

Pacholk said that another helpful fix to alleviate short staffing is for legislators to address the culture of workplace bullying. Employees are more likely to enjoy their jobs and keep at them when they don't work in a toxic environment. PEF has launched a "Toxic Tales" campaign to raise awareness about bullying and abusive conduct and will be pushing for the Senate to pass legislation next session that the Assembly already passed.

"New York state needs to define behaviors that constitute 'bullying' and 'abusive conduct' in statute as we have done for sexual abuse and to support specific protected classes," Pacholk said. "We need to set a clear standard of conduct in the workplace so that individuals who bully their colleagues or who act abusively can be held accountable for this conduct. This will improve service delivery to New Yorkers."

Legislators questioned Pacholk on these and other issues, like the Nurse Licensure Compact, which allows nurses to work in other states without the need to obtain additional licenses. While there is an argument that allowing nurses to travel to New York would increase the number of nurses in hospitals, PEF does not support this as a solution for New York.

"Many of the nurses who are part of the compact are travel nurses," Pacholk said. "They get paid more than full-time nurses and often do not have the same level of skill or experience."

Pacholk pointed out that there is a shortage of nurses across the country and the compact takes nurses from other states facing the same issue. It will not work as a long-term solution and it does not benefit PEF or public-sector employees, she said.

Many of the legislators agreed with Pacholk's call for Tier 6 reform with some even calling for it to be completely abolished.

Legislators took interest in Pacholk's focus on bolstering the workforce by adding more teachers to the system. In addition to forgiving loans for nurses and other health care professionals who stay within the SUNY or CUNY system for up to five years, Pacholk suggested helping those already in the system transition into teaching roles.

"We also need to try to reach high schoolers," Pacholk said. "They should know what options are available to them, but we need to make sure the educators are in place."

PEF delivered several other solutions in written testimony, including the adoption of scholarship programs, Preceptor Programs—like the mentoring program New York has for teachers—and called for the Nurse Practitioner Modernization Act to be made permanent. The act was introduced in 2014 and gave Nurse Practitioners the ability to work more independently of physicians when they surpassed 3600 hours of supervised care. The NPMA 2.0 introduced in 2022, had enhanced the NP autonomy and is set to expire on April 1, 2024.

For more information, [click here to read PEF's written testimony](#). Video of the hearing will be shared when available.



New Executive Board members were sworn in November 30 and December 1. Pictured, from left to right, are Mario Chiarello – ITS, Matthew Fagan – DFS; and Patricia Trowbridge – OPWDD.

Executive Board welcomes NYS AFL-CIO president; discusses health and safety, financials, and upcoming union campaigns

By KATE STICKLES

During the Executive Board's final meeting of 2023, the board heard from NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento and conducted other regular business of the union, including review of the independent audit, ratification of the staff contract, and issues PEF will champion in 2024.

Union solidarity

President Cilento praised PEF for its ability to get the word out on issues important to its members – and to union members across the state.

"PEF has always made its voice heard," he said. "There has never been a time in my 31 years, almost 12 as president, when someone – the governor, the houses of the legislature, the general public – doesn't know where PEF stands on an issue. You've made the most of who you are."

Cilento said in the coming year, collaboration will be the key to continued successes for union members across New York.

"It's great to have 2.5 million members, 3,000 unions, 24 percent of the workforce unionized [in New York]," he said. "But those numbers don't mean anything if you aren't all working off the same playbook. It doesn't mean anything unless we work together."



In conversations with PEF President Wayne Spence, Cilento said NYSUT, CSEA, and PEF, three of the largest unions in the state, are brainstorming ways to usher in fixes for the Tier 6 pension plan and fight back against the misinformation of the Freedom Foundation's anti-union attacks.



"We are going to get all of our communications departments together," he said. "We have to have a coordinated message, not only to the governor and the legislators, but also to the public. Myself and the leaders will have conversations with the governor and both houses and we will be able to say the entire labor movement in this state is united and asking for this."

Cilento also acknowledged the toxic work environments in many state agencies that PEF is actively campaigning against and pledged the NYS AFL-CIO's support.

"Everything that we do as a labor movement begins and ends right there," he said. "If we can't get dignity and respect for our members, we might as well not bother to do anything else. We are setting up a meeting to go in and speak to the governor and explain that the disrespect isn't just a problem for PEF, it's a problem for the entire labor movement and the state of New York. The entire labor movement now is in this; you're not by yourselves anymore."

Independent auditor's report

Thomas Gianatasio, of the Bonadio Group, reported a positive audit of PEF's finances as of March 31, 2022, and March 31, 2023.

"The process went very well," he said. "We are pleased to report no significant deficiencies or reportable issues. We issued the highest-level assurance. The financial condition of the organization remains strong."

The full audit report was published in the October issue of the Communicator.

Gianatasio touched on assets, liabilities, and noted the increase in expenses, due to a return to normal practices after the pandemic, and the struggling investment market over the past two years. PEF is weathering those issues well.

"PEF cash has been constant year after year," said Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue. "Our investments are balanced based on risk in the market. I have confidence in our investment team."

In his quarterly Secretary-Treasurer's report, Donahue also presented a car rental policy that was developed working with a committee and incorporated members' concerns. The policy, which was passed by the board, protects the union, while continuing to assist members with their transportation needs.

Secretary-Treasurer Donahue also addressed concerns about PEF expenditures, and welcomed any member who has questions or concerns to reach out to his office.

He praised the Organizing and Field Services departments, as well as member volunteers, for driving up membership, and as a result, dues income.

"Thank you for getting out there and engaging members," Donahue said.

AI and predictive algorithms

PEF's parole officers and the communities they serve have seen firsthand the dangers of predictive algorithms, with the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) system, introduced in 2012 in New York State.

As President Spence attends conferences and multi-union events, he often discusses the pitfalls of COMPAS.

"We talk about what PEF is doing when it comes to AI and predictive algorithms so that other unions are aware they need to start having conversations and asking their membership about AI," he said.

Using a grant from the National AFL-CIO, PEF studied the impact of COMPAS on the workplace.

"We saw that in several counties the predictive algorithm was having disastrous outcomes for Black and brown individuals. There was racial bias."

The union submitted a Freedom of Information Law request to DOCCS, but it was denied. President Spence said the battle for that information would continue as PEF leads the way on pushing for transparency and common-sense regulation surrounding the use of AI in the State workforce.



New members, campaigns

Director of Organizing Dan Carpenter reported the union gained 1,431 new members since the Executive Board meeting in September, bringing the year's total to 6,820 new members as of November 30, 2023.

"We are on a trajectory to reach 7,000 new members this year," he said. "That is almost double what we did last year."

On the organizing campaign front, Carpenter said PEF is making a strong push on toxic workplaces and bullying. He said the union is the leading voice on the issue right now and President Spence said he is now hearing other union leaders talking about workplace toxicity, too. Members interested in sharing a "toxic tale" from their agency can visit www.PEF.org/ToxicTales for more information.

The Organizing Department also has a table set up at Empire State Plaza in Albany to fight back against the anti-union group operating in New York State as Opt Out Today. PEF anticipates the group will ramp up its misinformation campaign with additional mailings during the holiday season. Anyone who has a question about anything they receive that appears questionable or is pretending to represent PEF is urged to contact Organizing Dan Carpenter at Daniel.Carpenter@pef.org.

Staff contract

The Executive Board voted to ratify the 2022-2026 collective bargaining agreement between PEF and its unionized staff, represented by USW Local 9265.

Contract highlights and changes include across-the-board raises of 2% in 2022, and 3% each year from 2023 to 2026; a \$3,000 signing bonus; lump sum payments of \$600 in 2024 and 2025; and a switch from a fully insured health plan to a PPO plan.

PEF Convention

Following the 2023 PEF Convention in Syracuse, delegates expressed frustration with shuttle service, unclean rooms, and other unsatisfactory conditions at the OnCenter and hotels.

"I was flabbergasted and flustered by how we were treated," President Spence said. "Dirty bathrooms from Sunday to Wednesday; food that had mold on it; people waiting four hours to get into their rooms."

Convention Chair and PEF Vice President Darlene Williams reported results to the board following a post-Convention survey of delegates.

"You want a good Convention, good food, you want to be safe, and you need a clean room," she said. "We did the work of the union, but there were some very real problems."

The board considered the option of walking away and choosing a new Convention location for 2024, but it would have been costly.

"If we walk, we leave \$170,000 on the table and would have to sue the center to recover that money" President Spence said.

After PEF shared survey results with the OnCenter in Syracuse, they offered a credit of \$30,000 to \$50,000 next year, possibly more. Williams said she will be pushing for the maximum amount possible.

The board voted to return to Syracuse, Sept. 15-18, 2024, for the union's 46th annual Convention.

The next Executive Board meeting will be held March 14-15, 2024, in Albany.



New legislation strengthens worker protections

By NAJEE WALKER

A recent package of legislation, supported by PEF and signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul on November 21, helps strengthen the rights of public sector workers in New York.

"On behalf of the 50,000 members of the NYS Public Employees Federation, we thank Governor Hochul for her continued work in support of the state workforce and for signing these important bills into law," said PEF President Wayne Spence in a press release sent out by the governor's office. "The Governor has been a real partner with labor as we work collectively to fortify the state's service delivery system after a decade of neglect."

The newly passed laws do many things, including ensuring access to health insurance for dependents and spouses of deceased state employees. One of the measures also strengthens Section 80 of the Civil Service Law.

Section 80 deals largely with the rights of employees who face layoffs, suspensions, or demotions due to agencies reducing positions, services or becoming obsolete. These protections include finding employment of a similar nature, as well as making sure employees are paid properly based on the circumstance of their layoff or suspension.

But there were gaps in Section 80 and the amendments address those.

Specifically, the legislation "provides rights to employees outside of the competitive class in the case of reduction in the workforce that are consistent with what is provided to employees in the competitive class. This new law will provide equal reduction and recall provisions in civil service law to permanently appointed employees in competitive, non-competitive, and labor jurisdictional classifications at all levels of state and local government."

The law also now protects public employees who have worked with their agencies for years and as a result earn higher salaries. These workers can no longer be laid off purely because of their cost to the State. Additionally, the law gives employees a chance to reclaim their old jobs at the first available opportunity.



Included also is a measure to ensure that the spouses and dependents of members who retired due to an accidental disability or performance of duty disability with less than 10 years of service continue to receive healthcare benefits after the retirees' death.

Additionally, a law important to PEF and other public sector unions clarifies what information employers are required to provide to employee organizations like unions. It states that unions are entitled to the home address of employees in their bargaining unit to facilitate contact outside of the workplace.

Finally, a law was passed that closes a loophole for arbitrations for public employees and employees by requiring a party to make an application to change or vacate an award within 90 days after the award's delivery. This allows for more timely resolutions to matters that require arbitration. This also means that parties that are unsuccessful during arbitration must decide if they intend to comply with the award or will vacate or modify in a timely manner.

The law will save unions like PEF fees, even though they may have won their arbitration.



PEF Training Specialist Tammy Carney talks about multiple generations at the Labor/Management Advisory Council meeting on December 8, 2023.

PEF leaders meet to discuss organizing around issues, strengthening Labor-Management committees

By KATE STICKLES

When management isn't at the labor/management table, things at your agency can take a turn for the worse. And even when they are there, managers may not fully understand the implications of changes in the workplace.

At the Labor/Management Advisory Council meeting on December 8 in Albany, attendees heard legislative updates, learned about working with multiple generations on an L/M team, and discussed how to organize campaigns around an L/M topic.

"We are in times that are very difficult," said PEF Vice President Darlene Williams. "You sit at the L/M table, and you think the people across from you understand. Maybe they don't." She emphasized the need to communicate so management knows what is going on and how it is impacting your agency.

"At the DOL (Department of Labor), where management did not sit at the table, they implemented AI (Artificial Intelligence) and now it's a problem," she said. "PEF worked hard at the contract table to discuss the best way to bring AI into L/M so changes wouldn't be sprung on people."

For DOL, leaving labor out of the equation led to claims being processed by machines, not highly skilled PEF members.

"That leads to loss of jobs," Williams said. "We don't need AI doing our jobs."



PEF Vice President Darlene Williams speaking at the December 8th Labor/Management Advisory Council meeting.

Organizing around L/M

The strength of PEF lies in the hands of its members, which is why those members need a roadmap to empower them in the face of professional and personal challenges.

"The public sector has seen significant shifts in staffing, policy, and work culture," said PEF Director of Organizing Dan Carpenter. "In this landscape, staying informed, connected, and proactive is not just beneficial – it's essential."



Carpenter outlined multiple ways to face labor/management issues head on, including: awareness and education; data collection and documentation; storytelling and testimonial sharing; active participation in union activities; continuing advocacy and lobbying; solidarity and collective action; media engagement; and continuous feedback.

"We cannot underestimate the power of knowledge," he said. "It's the foundation on which we build our strategies and actions. But knowledge is not enough, which is why our second step involves data collection and documentation."

Gathering data allows for a compelling, fact-based narrative to bring to the table. So does storytelling and testimonials, which put a human face on issues and remind us of the real-life implications of policy and management decisions.

"Our union is only as strong as the involvement and commitment of its members," Carpenter said. "Regular meetings, volunteering for committees, and participating in the process are all good ways to contribute to and shape the future. Lobbying and advocacy and solidarity and collective action are some of our greatest strengths."

Media engagement and soliciting continuous feedback are also key strategies to achieving union goals and getting things done.

"We can leverage social media platforms to share stories and amplify our voice with the public," he said. "Using designated hashtags, we can unify our message and increase visibility."

Members can email stories to Communicator@pef.org; post comments on our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/PublicEmployeesFederation>), which remain hidden from the public; or visit www.pef.org/toxictales to get involved in PEF's ongoing toxic workplace campaign.

Multiple generations

Spread across the walls of the meeting room were signs listing generations – meeting attendees were asked to put a sticker on the poster that corresponded with their generation.

It was a dynamic bunch.

"We live in a time in which you may be working beside someone from a different generation than yourself," said PEF Training Specialist Tammy Carney. "Some people are remaining in the workforce longer, so we have more generations working alongside each other."

Carney said each generation brings its own strengths and weaknesses to union work. Members of the "silent" generation, born between 1928 to 1945, value patience and rules, stay married for life, work one job throughout their career and have a pension.

That's less common for today's generation.

Generation Z has strong connections to the world thanks to social media and the instantaneous nature of information; they are highly educated but enter the workforce in debt; and they are often entrepreneurial and independent.

These life experiences mean different preferences in the workplace.

"The Silent, if there are changes, it's difficult for them," Carney said. "They believe in the 'chain of command' and technology could be difficult for them. Gen X's 'latch key' kids may not work well in groups. Millennials may find it difficult to work on just one thing at a time."

Union committees should make the most of what each generation has to offer.

"It's important to find common ground and meet in the middle and if we learn more about each generation, it may make more sense why our teammates prefer to accomplish a task one way while we prefer another," Carney said.



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PEF secures overtime backpay for thousands earned during COVID

By ROB MERRILL

Thanks to PEF's persistence, the State will begin paying more than 1,700 current and former members of the Professional, Scientific and Technical bargaining unit for overtime work on certain COVID-19 preparedness and response projects.

"This is a major win that only happened because PEF led the way," said President Wayne Spence.

The union initiated a claim for the money in June 2020 when members alerted PEF that they didn't think they were being sufficiently paid for overtime they worked during the ongoing state of emergency. The primary challenge was that the State underpaid overtime wages. Instead of paying one-and-one-half times an employees' regular rate of pay, some employees were paid a lesser, blended rate for their overtime.

More than three years later, due to PEF's efforts, the State will pay nearly \$3 million to more than 1,700 PEF members who worked processing unemployment insurance claims at the Department of Labor, as well as members at other agencies who worked on additional Department of Health COVID-19-related preparedness and response projects. The payments include the underpayment to make each member whole for the work they performed, as well as interest that accrued on that money, calculated at 9% annually. More than 400 CSEA employees will also receive back overtime.

"I'd like to thank the PEF General Counsel's office and PEF Contract Administration for their persistence on this issue," said President Spence. "It is a great example of the value of unions. Members brought it to our attention, we acted on their behalf, and now civil servants across the State, who sacrificed so much to serve their fellow New Yorkers during the pandemic, will benefit because of PEF's leadership."

[Albany Times Union: COVID pay due to state workers](#)
(link downloads a PDF)

Covered employees on the State's Administrative Payroll who were overtime-eligible when they performed the work received payments in their paycheck on December 20. Employees on the Institution Payroll will receive theirs on December 28, 2023.

The State paid or will pay the principal amount owed to each employee on those pay dates. The interest on the money owed is still being calculated and should be paid in January 2024. The State is also in the process of calculating the principal and interest amounts owed to approximately 270 overtime-ineligible current and former members of the PS&T unit. PEF anticipates those payments will be made in early 2024.

PEF is sending letters in the mail to each person receiving payments containing their pay information and the data the State used to calculate their payment. Members who wish to dispute the amount should reach out to their PEF field representative as soon as possible, after they have received their payments and the mailing from PEF. If you don't know who that is, [call your regional](#) office and they can assist.





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PEF members help NY State parks and historic sites celebrate 100 years

By KATE STICKLES

It's going to be a *big* year for the New York state parks and historic sites system in 2024.

Across New York, from Niagara Falls to Long Island, parks and historic sites will be celebrating 100 years of connecting the public to nature and history, and PEF members are at the forefront of fostering the celebration from planning to reality.

You may have lived in New York your entire life – but did you know Niagara Falls State Park is the oldest state park in America and Washington's headquarters in Newburgh, N.Y. is the first publicly owned historic site.

"The creation of the State Council of Parks in 1924 was a watershed moment for New York," said PEF member Kate Jenkins, a digital communications specialist in the public affairs bureau at the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP). "It unified the state's growing collection of parks and sites and provided an impetus for the acquisition and creation of new lands."

A NYSOPRHP community relations representative and PEF member since 2015, Tyler Wilcox said voters approved a \$15 million Bond Act in 1924 to build and enlarge a network of state parks. Over the next decade, 55 new state parks were established, forging the New York state park and historic site system that residents and visitors cherish today.

Publicizing an historic anniversary

A lot of work goes into bringing a Centennial celebration to the public. Planning began in mid-2022 and officially kicked off with a two-day tour in August 2023 along with the launch of [Centennial-specific webpages](#). The site features a [90-second video](#) meant to spark interest in the coming campaign.

"Our Division of Historic Preservation is supporting the development of an interactive timeline of the history of New York state parks and sites," Jenkins said. "Our Friends groups and other state agencies are supporting our efforts to get the word out."

Jenkins and Wilcox are coordinating extensively with media across the state on stories about the system and the Centennial celebration. Agency social media channels are featuring Centennial content to build excitement.

"Everyone at Parks is excited about the Centennial, and we can't wait to celebrate it with all of New York State," Jenkins said. "2024 will be a year of special celebratory events throughout the state. Beloved established events like First Day Hikes on January 1 and I Love My Park Day on the first Saturday in May will have a Centennial flare in 2024."

"We're introducing a [Centennial Challenge](#), which will encourage people to experience all our parks and sites have to offer by completing 24 out of a list of 100 activities," she said. "We're also inviting people to share their own stories about our parks and sites and have a special [Centennial line of merchandise](#)."

With 250 properties, there is a lot to share.

"There are so many unique stories, properties, and programs that the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has the opportunity to promote," Wilcox said. "Our Centennial is a perfect milestone to highlight and share our agency's work with the public so they can continue to explore and create new and more meaningful connections with our parks and historic sites."

What NY State Parks & Historic Sites have to offer

"The value of the parks system is immense," Jenkins said. "In its 100 years of existence, the NY State Parks system has expanded to more than 250 properties, offering all New Yorkers a vital opportunity to connect to nature and learn about the history of New York."

Whether you want an escape from daily life, a lesson in New York's 400 years of history, a day at the beach, a round of golf, or a stroll through forests, fields, and gorges, the NY State Parks system has a place for you.

But parks are more than just recreational places to visit – they are vital to the plant, wildlife, and natural wonders of New York.

"Parks offer crucial habitat to an array of flora and fauna and preserve green space," Jenkins said. "Many of our parks are home to unique natural features: the waterfalls at Robert Treman and Pixley Falls, the incredible view and remarkable fossils at Thatcher State Park, the drumlins at Chimney Bluffs, the wetlands and sand barrens at Clay Pit Ponds Preserve, just to name a few!"

Wilcox echoed the importance of both natural resources and opportunities for recreation.

"New York is home to some of the most iconic natural, historic, and cultural resources, and the Parks system helps to preserve those priceless landscapes and ecosystems for the public to enjoy responsibly."

Spanning more than 360,000 acres, the NY State Parks system is one of the largest in the United States. From recreational trails, to golf courses, and much more, parks foster health and fitness and offer affordable destinations for everyone. During the height of COVID-19, the value of parks was unparalleled.



"The need for outdoor space was further heightened during the pandemic during which our visitation hit record levels," Wilcox said.

They're also a key cog in New York's economic wheel.

"They drive tourism – one of New York's strongest industries – by welcoming nearly 80 million New York residents and visitors from around the world last year alone," Wilcox said. "All of this helps to promote economic development."

Looking ahead

While the Centennial celebrates 100 years of the NY State Parks system, it also sets the stage for the next 100 years and beyond.

"As an agency, we're striving to make our parks and sites truly welcoming and accessible to everyone and to reach new and underserved audiences," Jenkins said. "We're leading on climate change and resiliency, progressing toward a goal of powering our facilities with 100% renewable energy by 2030, and we're continuing to invest in our parks and sites after a long period of under-investment."

With the help of Jenkins and Wilcox, we compiled a list of parks and historic sites, one in each PEF Region. [Click here to see what was featured in your region!](#)



Promotional image used in the 100 years "We'll see you out there" campaign.

Noteworthy state parks and historic sites in each PEF region

Region 1: Niagara Falls State Park

The mighty crash of Niagara Falls is indisputably the focal point of America's first state park. Millions of visitors flock to the attractions, interactive exhibits and miles of hiking trails. Whether you choose to feel the water and wind on the Maid of the Mist tour, get completely drenched at the Cave of the Winds pavilion, or view the American and Horseshoe Falls atop the Observation Tower, there are awe-inspiring adventures for everyone.

This magnificent natural wonder formed 12,000 years ago when water, released from melting ice during the ice age, plunged over the edge of the Niagara Escarpment, a steep slope running east to west from New York to Ontario, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois. It was the home of the first large-scale hydroelectric generation station, opened in 1895, and in 1896, electrical engineer Nikola Tesla proved he could transmit electricity from Niagara Falls to Buffalo using his new AC induction motor.



Region 2: Watkins Glen State Park

With 19 waterfalls, this beautiful Finger Lakes park offers visitors a chance to get up close and personal with nature's water wonders. Formed by glacial activity, the gorge path winds over and under waterfalls, sprinkling a fine mist over you as you pass through Cavern Cascade. The rim trail offers spectacular views of the gorge and its many geological features.

The state purchased the park in 1906. In 2015, the park was chosen from more than 6,000 state parks across the United States to compete for USA Today's Reader's Choice Poll for Best State Park in the United States. Watkins Glen won third!



Region 3: Ganondagan State Historic Site

If you have an interest in Native American history, head on out to the town of Victor, where Ganondagan State Historic Site sits on 569 acres, the original site of a 17th century Seneca town. Ganondagan is the only state historic site dedicated to a Native American theme. It brings the culture, art, agriculture and government of the Seneca people to life and portrays how it influenced our modern understanding of equality, democratic government, women's rights, ecology, and natural foods.

One of the most impressive features of the park, the full-size Seneca Bark Longhouse, is fully furnished to reflect a typical Seneca family from the late 1600s, complete with reproductions of 17th century objects. The site also offers interactive exhibits in the Seneca Art & Culture Center, and interpretive trails.



Region 4: Green Lakes State Park

Visitors to Green Lakes State Park can't miss the beautiful blue-green of the two glacial lakes, formed 15,000 years ago, and surrounded by old-growth forest of hemlocks and tulip trees. The 200-foot deep lakes are "meromictic," meaning there is no fall and spring mixing of surface and bottom waters, leaving a high potential for evidence of ancient plant and animal life.

The park also boasts an 18-hole golf course, designed by Robert Trent Jones, 15 miles of trails, and a popular beach that lets you get up close and personal with the unique water.



Region 5: Robert Treman State Park

There are not many places you can go in New York and see 12 waterfalls, including a 115-foot cascade. Located in Ithaca, the Enfield Glen gorge winds along the waterfalls, and a viewpoint along the trail offers visitors the chance to see a mile-and-a-half-down.

Robert H. Treman was the first chairman of the Finger Lakes State Parks Commission. He and his wife, Laura, purchased hundreds of acres which they donated to the state to be preserved as green space. In addition to this park, the donation protects Buttermilk Falls State Park, Taughannock Falls State Park, Six Mile Creek Natural Area, and Cascadilla Gorge and Trail.



Region 6: Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site

The Erie Canal is one of the 19th century's greatest commercial and engineering projects and the Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site preserves that history for visitors, year-round. Many of the site's structures date back to the three eras of the canal's development.

Among the highlights are the Putnam Lock Stand at Yankee Hill that houses an exhibit on Erie Canal stores and the remains of the Schoharie Aqueduct. It is also the location of 18th century Fort Hunter and Lower Castle Mohawk Village.



Region 7: John Brown Farm State Historic Site

You might have heard the lyrics, "John Brown's body lies a-mounering in the grave," but did you know that grave is in New York? You can visit it at the John Brown Farm State Historic Site.

John Brown is best known for the 1859 assault on the U.S. Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, during which Brown and his followers planned to use captured arms in a campaign for the liberation of slaves in the South. The plan failed and Brown was captured and hanged.



Region 8: Thacher State Park

One of the richest fossil-bearing formations in the world, Thacher State Park, named after Albany mayor John Boyd Thacher, sits along the Helderberg Escarpment and encompasses six miles of limestone cliff-face, rock-strewn slopes, woodland, and open fields. From the park, you can see the Hudson-Mohawk Valleys and the Adirondack and Green Mountains.

Visitors can traverse the famous Indian Ladder Trail, which was used by the Mohawk Iroquois 400 years ago to reach a trading post run by the Dutch. The trail descends 60 feet to the base of the Escarpment, passing under Minelot Falls and exiting through a small cave.



Region 9: Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park

The longest elevated pedestrian bridge in the world is here in New York. At the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park, opened in 2009, visitors can walk, jog, or bike the 212-foot-high, 1.28-mile former railroad bridge spanning the Hudson River.

Through immense community support, bolstered by state, federal and not-for-profit groups, the walkway took a dilapidated relic and turned it into a top attraction. Ride the glass elevator up to the park or down to the Poughkeepsie waterfront and enjoy the scenery of the bridge from atop and below.



Region 10: Riverbank State Park

Where can you see something that is the only one of its kind in the Western Hemisphere? Riverbank State Park! The urban rooftops of Japan inspired this 28-acre multi-level landscaped recreation area 69 feet above the Hudson River.

Among the attractions at the park, named for former Assemblyman Herman Denny Farrell, are an Olympic-sized pool, a covered skating rink, an 800-seat theater, a 2,500-seat athletic complex and a 150-seat restaurant. There's even more outside, with a 25-yard lap pool, a wading pool, tennis, basketball and paddleball courts, and a running track.



Region 11: Shirley Chisholm State Park

Named for Shirley Chisholm, the first African American congresswoman and the first woman and African American to run for president, this park rises 130 feet above sea level and occupies some of the highest ground in New York City.

On the site of former landfills spanning 407 acres, more than 1.2 million cubic yards of clean soil, enough to fill 100,000 dump trucks, was brought in to spread across the site. Afterward, 35,000 trees and shrubs were planted, creating a diverse ecosystem for people to enjoy.



Region 12: Jones Beach State Park

With 6.5 miles of white-sand beach and more than 2,400 acres of maritime environment, Jones Beach State Park on the south shore of Long Island is known worldwide, drawing more than six million visitors a year.

The park has something for everyone. A boardwalk, the beach, a nature center, restaurants and other food options, fishing, playgrounds, and much more. The park was created by master builder Robert Moses in the 1920s by dredging sand from what is now the State Boat Channel. Moses raised the elevation of the barrier islands by 14 feet, connecting several small islands into one long one. He created a "people's park" out of what he described as mosquito infested swamp and small islands.



National parks preserve American labor history

By KATE STICKLES

With New York state parks and historic sites celebrating 100 years in 2024, many eyes will be on our natural, historical, and cultural history. Looking beyond New York state, the National Park Foundation (NPF) highlights quite a few labor history stories and leaders.

"The history of a nation is a reflection of its people, a rich, interwoven tapestry full of triumphs and struggles alike," said Rebecca Watson in a blog post titled Labor History in National Parks on the [National Park Foundation website](#). "Labor history is an undercurrent of many of these stories, documenting the ways people have worked to put food on their tables, raise their families, and make a living."

"The labor movement, recorded and preserved in national parks across the country, stemmed from the need to protect workers' interests, fight for better working conditions, safety, and health benefits, as well as racial and gender equality."

Pullman National Historic Park

In 2015, Chicago got its first National Park Service unit with the designation of Pullman National Historical Park. The park tells the story of America's first planned model industrial community and is significant for the American labor and civil rights movements.

Of note, A. Philip Randolph, a labor organizer, and political strategist, founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in 1925 and gained membership in the American Federation of Labor, making the BSCP the first Black labor union in the United States.

"At the time, porters made up 44% of the Pullman workforce, making it the nation's largest employer of African Americans," according to the NPF. "The BSCP advocated for an improvement of working conditions and treatment of African American railroad porters and maids. In 1937, BSCP and the Pullman Company reached a landmark agreement, an important step for African American civil rights."

Lowell National Historical Park

The site of two strikes, one in 1834 and another in 1836, the Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts is a prime example of how the industrial revolution informed the way we work today.

Young women and immigrants spent 12 to 14 hours in the mills, performed laborious tasks in often unhealthy conditions. Organized mostly by the women, workers at the mills struck to fight back against those conditions and reduced wages.

In 1844, the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association came together to advance women's rights at the state level, joining other local labor groups to advocate for the 10-hour maximum workday.



National Park Service - Boott Cotton Mill Weave Room

César E. Chávez National Monument

The United Farm Workers of America (UFW), previously the National Farm Workers Association, is the first enduring and largest farm workers union. The union formed in the face of more than 100 years of harsh conditions, discrimination and violence.

César E. Chávez and other community organizers founded the UFW, bringing a burial program, credit union, health care, daycare, and job training to farms across California. In the 1970s, it expanded to become a national voice for farm workers.

Chávez's "leadership brought sustained international attention to the plight of U.S. farm workers and secured higher wages and safer working conditions for them," according to the NPF. "Chávez is widely recognized as one of the most important Latino leaders in the United States during the twentieth century."



DMV members are dedicated to safety for all on the roads

By KATE STICKLES

Since joining state service six months ago, PEF member Jiangni Brown, a Highway Safety Program Analyst with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), already wears a few hats and spends a lot of time out in the community ensuring safety on the road.

Shortly after she came aboard, Brown took on the role of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator for outreach in the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee.

"When program representatives go out to counties to meet with our partners, I tag along and meet as many as possible to discuss their DEI initiatives or any plans they have pertaining to DEI issues," Brown said. "Together, we come up with new ways to engage their communities, especially parts they have historically not been able to interact with."

Sometimes the outreach is as simple as making sure those communities have traffic safety materials in multiple languages.

"As a DEI coordinator, my role is not limited," she said. "Diversity, equity, and inclusion can be applied to any and all individuals."

Safe fits

Brown didn't stop there, jumping into additional training for a variety of jobs and programs with a direct impact on the community.

"When I first came on to the job, I realized I wanted to take a more hands-on approach," she said. "I trained to become a CarFit technician, a car seat technician, and became part of the Child Passenger Safety Advisory Board."

CarFit is an educational program that aims to help older adults determine how well their personal vehicles "fit" them and provides information and materials about resources that can enhance their safety as drivers and allow them to be more mobile in their communities.

"As a CarFit technician, our main goal is to get individuals who come to us the right fit for their car," Brown said. "Our events are education only, but we assure that everyone that comes in will not have to worry about their license being taken away or anything of that nature. All we want to do is help drivers be safe in their cars."

Kids and teens

For the youth in the community, Brown's work in child passenger safety can mean the difference between life and death in an accident.

"As a new car seat technician, I can say that I have been astounded by the impact we have on the people that come to our events," she said. "It was very apparent during my training that the people who choose to become technicians do it for the sole purpose of making the world safer for children."

Brown has participated in three low-income car seat distribution events. Funded by a Child Passenger Safety grant, event organizers can offer one free car seat to low-income individuals and families.

"It is a very rewarding program for everyone," she said. "Those who come to obtain car seats are given education throughout the time they are there: from learning what car seat is the best and determining what seat they need, to how to install the seat and buckle in their child."

Attending events like these can be daunting, Brown said.

"It takes a lot of courage for these individuals to come to these events and admit they need help and be open to assistance," she said. "Some of the individuals who volunteer at these events are law enforcement and for some people that can be scary."



"Through this program, a level of trust and communication is built," Brown said. "The amount of lives this program saves every day is immeasurable and it creates a positive connection between the technician and individual."

The DMV is also working with Teen Driving Solutions out of Virginia to bring their multi-day, hands-on driving program to New York teenagers.

"It's more than a defensive driving course, it's a two-day course that both the teen drivers and their parents go through," Brown explained. "The teen drivers go through hours of hands-on training with instructors through a predesigned course that focuses on almost every situation one might run into when driving."

"Hard breaking, weaving through cones, how to maintain control in slippery conditions, what to do if you spin out, and many more," she said.

The list goes on

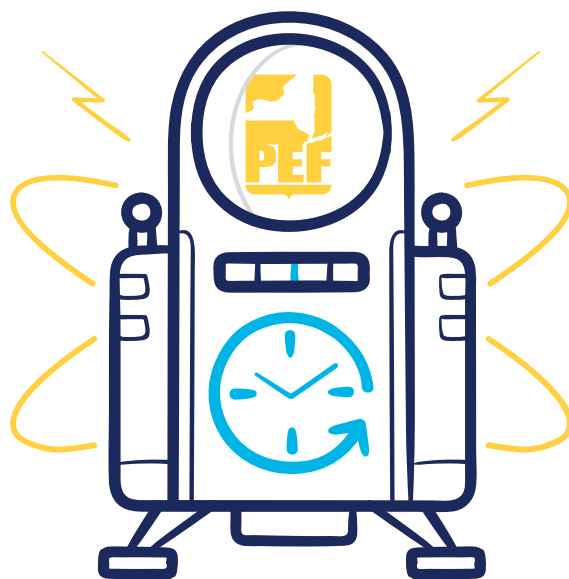
Brown touted other Governor's Traffic Safety Committee programs, such as the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety program, where representatives hand out safety materials, a water bottle, and a small snack; pedestrian and bike programs catering to New Yorkers who do not have a car; and the impaired driving program.

"I hear of all the hard work the impaired program does to train law enforcement to become drug recognition experts," Brown said. "Attempting to pick one program out of all our safety topics that we cover is impossible. They all connect to each other."

The programs Brown highlighted are just a peek at what the DMV does every day.



"The amount of lives our programs save daily is immeasurable," she said. "Everything that everyone does in this office is for the betterment of road safety in New York. Road safety pertains to all – drivers, passengers, pedestrians, cyclists, anyone who uses the roads."



PEF Blast from the Past: Union efforts prevent layoffs in 1987

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Rallies and grassroots organizing are one of the strongest tools any labor union can use to make their voices heard on an issue. In 1987, when budget cuts threatened the livelihood of many PEF members, more than 1,000 members from across the state assembled in Albany for what media at the time called the largest public demonstration in the state capital by a single labor union.

“Proposed budget cuts will devastate essential programs in the Labor Department, Mental Health and Mental Retardation,” then-PEF President Rand Condell said at the demonstration, held March 30, 1987 in Albany at the Capitol. “Hundreds of dedicated state employees will be forced out of their jobs. The public will be robbed of services.”

Thanks largely to PEF’s rally and lobbying, lawmakers passed a bill to fund the Department of Labor with an additional \$3 million to protect against layoffs until the federal government could provide additional funds. The bill also saved about 130 jobs at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn.

In 1987, PEF was not yet a decade old and the win demonstrated the growing union’s power and influence.

Thirty-six years later and PEF still relies on member advocacy and large-scale gatherings to show lawmakers our solidarity, as in the Sept. 21, 2023, [rally against toxic work environments](#) held during the fall meeting of the PEF Executive Board in Albany.





A THOUSAND STRONG — More than 1,000 PEF members rallied at the state Capitol in late March as part of the union's effort to save jobs and essential public services in the new state budget. It was the largest capital rally organized by a single group. (Photo by Bill Smith)

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Lobbying & Legwork

PEF's 1-2 Punch Spares Jobs, Vital Services

By Ronald Kermani
Editor

State Labor Department employees are in the middle of their second unprecedented layoff reprieve as PEF concentrates this month on prying federal money loose to keep them working after July 1.

The layoff reprieve was announced only two days after PEF organized what observers said was the largest

public demonstration in Albany by a single labor union.

More than 1,000 PEF members from

Cuomo Vetoes Labor Bill See Page 4

across New York converged on the state Capitol in late March to protest budget cuts which would have devas-

tated programs in the Labor Department, and the Office of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

Responding to PEF's incessant lobbying and grass-roots support, state lawmakers passed a bill allocating about \$5 million to keep Labor Department jobs intact until federal money is received.

Legislators also earmarked money which is expected to save about 130 jobs at the Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in New York City.

Union officials, however, said they could not immediately tell if the budget approved for OMRDD includes any layoffs. The new OMRDD spending plan does make department officials

more accountable to the Legislature in areas such as facility closings.

It was also not clear at press time what specific spending bills, if any, Gov. Mario Cuomo will veto.

While Cuomo and lawmakers tinkered with a \$41 billion state budget, more than 1,000 PEF demonstrators rallied outside legislative offices March 30 and shouted "They say layoffs, we say fight back!"

That fight has taken PEF officials and the rank and file to Washington, where the stakes are as high for state Labor Department employees who were twice saved from pink slips, but face another layoff July 1.

(Continued on Page 8)

Albany Rally

(Continued from Page 1)

PEF lobbyists have been mustering support in Washington for a measure restoring millions of dollars in federal aid to the state Labor Department. If approved, that money would cancel the third planned layoff of several hundred department workers.

"We're optimistic the federal money will come in July and save these workers from pink slips," said PEF Political Action Chairman Jerry Hazanitz. "Our lobbying efforts are now geared in that direction."

In an unprecedented move, PEF halted the scheduled layoff of Labor Department employees in March with a vigorous lobbying and grass roots effort that included letter-writing campaigns and regional demonstrations.

The second layoff abeyance was announced early last month, when Cuomo said he had found untapped federal money in the department to avert a layoff through June 30.

Labor Department problems were not the only focus of the huge March 30 demonstration which packed an Albany meeting hall with PEF members, lawmakers and reporters.

"Proposed budget cuts will devastate essential programs in the Labor Department, Mental Health and Mental Retardation," PEF President Rand Condell told demonstrators only hours before the April 1 state budget deadline.

"Hundreds of dedicated state employees will be forced out of their jobs. The public will be robbed of services," Condell continued.

Others echoed Condell's strong convictions to maintain vital public services.

"We're playing the game of life and death with people's lives," said Assemblyman Frank Barbaro, chairman of the Assembly Labor Committee and a close ally of PEF.

"No God-damned movie actor is going to put you out of work!" he exclaimed, referring to President Reagan and federal budget cuts which spawned the first round of Labor Department layoffs.

PEF's legislative and grass roots efforts to avert layoffs and preserve vital public services were lauded by state Sen. Nicholas Spano, chairman of the Senate Mental Health Committee.

"You have been diligently speaking out (on these issues) and should be commended for it," Spano told PEF demonstrators.

Added Sen. Franz Leichter, a member of the Senate Labor Committee: "What you are doing — providing services 365 days a year — is terrific. We have the responsibility to fund you adequately. Your case is justified and you shall prevail."



PEF Assistant Director of Organizing, Dr. Christine Pluviose, spent hours answering questions from members who stopped by the PEF table

PEF on the Plaza: Educating members about the value of their union

By **NAJEE WALKER**

This year more than any other, PEF members received multiple dishonest communications via email and regular mail containing false details about opting out of the union. Organized labor is often the target of propaganda and disinformation at the hands of anti-union groups seeking to weaken and divide the power of working people.

To combat this, the PEF Organizing Department has set up an information table at the Empire State Plaza in Albany to educate members about the value of their union membership and benefits. The initiative was first introduced during a telephone town hall held by President Wayne Spence in November.

"We will be set up at a table in the Empire State Plaza every Wednesday during lunch time to talk to members and employees in the area about PEF, the contract, and other issues," PEF Organizing Director Dan Carpenter said during the town hall. "For those who are not in Albany and cannot visit the plaza, please email me — Daniel.Carpenter@pef.org — and we will connect with your leaders and figure out how to provide this education to you and other members."

On December 6, PEF Assistant Director of Organizing, Dr. Christine Pluviose, spent hours answering questions from members who stopped by the PEF table, including many who just recently signed their union cards.

Many members already knew about the anti-union tactics deployed by various organizations, either from being members in other unions before PEF or because they received a particularly disingenuous recent postcard in the mail — pretending to offer \$800 in exchange for dropping their PEF membership.

"Like I would leave the union for \$800!" said one member who stopped by the table. "My contract is worth much more than that."

Members curious about PEF's presence on the plaza also stopped by to discuss the contract and new benefits, especially the new dental stipend, which provides members with \$400 every year that New York State chooses to contract with EmblemHealth to deliver dental insurance to PEF members.

"We want members to know that we are doing our absolute best to make sure they are covered," Pluviose said. "We want them to know that their union has their back and is mitigating costs."

Members also dropped by to discuss issues with their agencies and were told by Pluviose that they should reach out to PEF any time they face issues or are thinking about filing a grievance. She assured new members to take advantage of the protection PEF offers them in the event of any disciplinary measure by management.

"You do not want to enter the room alone if that happens," Pluviose said. "Reach out to us, or if you know who your field representative is, reach out to them immediately."

"PEF on the Plaza" will continue on Dec. 13, 20 and 27 — every Wednesday for the remainder of this year — from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. All PEF members are encouraged to stop by, even if it's just to say hi!





PEF staff donate to food pantry

During the month of December, PEF held a food donation drive to support the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, in conjunction with the Capital District Area Labor Foundation (CDALF).

Spearheaded by PEF Executive Assistant to the President, Susan Marr, the drive brought in enough food to fill six boxes. On Dec. 14,

a Teamsters truck rolled into the parking lot at PEF Headquarters in Latham to collect the donated goods.

CDALF then delivered the truck full of donations to the Regional Food Bank the following day.



FOOD PANTRIES HELP OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED!



Seeking PEF delegates for AFT & SEIU Conventions

Dues-paying PEF members can petition to be a delegate at the 2024 SEIU Convention from May 19 to 22 in Philadelphia, or the AFT Convention from July 22 to 24 in Houston.

To attend either convention, your title must be in the title groupings for that organization, and you must obtain 50 signatures to be seated. Attendance at the AFT and SEIU conventions requires use of accruals. These conventions are not eligible for Employee Organization Leave. Travel and lodging will be arranged and provided by PEF.

The petitions are due by 5 p.m. on January 3, 2024, via mail to PEF, P.O. Box 12414, Albany, NY 12212, or email Divisions@pef.org. Petitions may not be dropped off at any PEF office. If you have questions regarding the AFT/SEIU Delegate Election process, contact the PEF Divisions Department at 800-342-4306, ext. 337, or email Divisions@pef.org.





Arias wins Executive Board seat

Ballots to determine who would fill **Executive Board Seat 310**, representing certain members at the state Office of Mental Health, were counted December 14 at the American Arbitration Association in New York City.

Rudy Arias defeated Donna C. Sherry-Cervantes. Arias is a mental health program specialist 2 at the Office of Mental Health Central Office in Albany. He is also a PEF steward, a Convention delegate, and the treasurer of PEF Division 392.



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Programming course bolsters members' knowledge and use of Python

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Executive Board Member Prakash Lal recently organized a week-long in-person training for PEF members working for the Office of Information Technology Services (OITS) through the Public Service Workshop Program in Albany. The training, which ran the week of November 13, focused on teaching members the Python programming language. A specialized instructor from the United Kingdom taught the class of 14 participants: Participants Anderson Orchid, Diane Boyd, Nick Castaldi, Gregory Gerling, Xiaojing Hu, Susan Johnson, Prakash Lal, Daniel Leo, Bethani McCauslin, Cedrick Pinder, Michal Prestipino, Engels Rojas, Temidayo Sokunbi and Tomomi Watanabe-Hudspath.

"Python is a very popular and general-purpose programming language," Lal said. "It is used for many purposes including data analysis, web development, cyber security and especially for artificial intelligence."

PEF has been at the forefront regarding artificial intelligence and its impact on the State workforce. In October, Lal and OITS colleague and Executive Board member, Chris Ford, [testified before a joint State hearing on AI in the Workplace](#).

the PEF pulse

Introducing the PEF Pulse!

With our busy schedules, time is valuable. That's why we have reimagined the way we share important news and union updates with our members. PEF Pulse will bring you "breaking news" or important information that can't wait for the next full issue of The Communicator, which will still be delivered to your in-box 10 times each year and can always be read at Communicator.PEF.org.

When a benefit enrollment period begins or new union leaders are elected, PEF Pulse will let you know. If a major union event occurs before we publish The Communicator, PEF Pulse will share it with you.

We are always looking for feedback, so please be in touch at Communicator@pef.org. If you have an idea for a story, know someone who deserves or received recognition for their work, or hear about a member making a difference in their community, give PEF Editor Kate Stickles a call or send an email to Communicator@pef.org.

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2024 Empire Plan, HMO Premium Rates Finalized

The Option Transfer Period is open until December 29, 2023

The New York State Department of Civil Service has finalized the Empire Plan and HMO premium rates for 2024. Empire Plan premium rates are adjusted annually based on enrollee utilization and projected costs.

These rates are not negotiated by PEF. The union negotiates the level of benefits, and the employee/state premium percentage cost share, which did not change from 2023 to 2024.

For PEF-represented employees in titles Salary Grade 9 and below, the state will pay 88% of the cost of premium for individual coverage and 73% for the additional cost of family coverage. For Salary Grade 10 and above, the state will pay 84% of the cost of the premium for individual coverage and 69% for the additional cost of family coverage.

The 2024 Empire plan premium rates are indicated below:

For SG 9 and below:

- The current individual coverage biweekly premium deduction is \$56.01; it will be \$60.07 in 2024, a 7.2% increase.
- The current family coverage biweekly premium deduction is \$241.79; it will be \$271.92 in 2024, a 12.5% change.

For SG 10 and above:

- The current individual coverage biweekly premium deduction is \$74.68; it will be \$80.09 in 2024, a 7.2% increase.
- The current family coverage biweekly premium deduction is \$287.98; it will be \$323.33 in 2024, a 12.3% change.

Active employees can submit and make changes to their benefits online using [MyNYSHIP](#).

Any changes must be submitted no later than December 29, 2023. You can find information on Option Transfer, such as premium rates and plan comparisons, on the Civil Service [website](#).

For more details, visit the PEF health benefits page [here](#).



Are you interested in a career with PEF?

The New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF) is a diverse and powerful labor union committed to creating a better working life for its members. PEF staff work in various departments in collaboration with PEF's elected union leadership to serve 50,000 members employed in professional, scientific, and technical titles across the State. Some of PEF's departments include: Communications, Contract Administration, Field Services, Finance, Health & Safety, Legal, Legislative and Organizing. If you believe in workers' rights, justice and equality, then a career in the labor movement may be right for you. To see what opportunities are available at PEF, please visit our [Careers Page](#).



Beware of scammers this time of year

Happy Holidays, PEF Retirees!

I am providing information from our Attorney General as well as AARP in this edition of Retirees in Action.

Dear New Yorkers,

It's unfortunate, but true: Seniors are often targeted for financial exploitation and investment fraud. A recent study found that, in just a single year, older adults lost at least \$2.9 billion to fraud committed both by persons they know and trust and by complete strangers. And, to make matters worse, victims who lose their money are unlikely to get it back, even if the perpetrators are apprehended.

It's important that everyone has the right tools and information to make decisions about their finances, and to know the best ways to protect themselves and their hard earned money. This guidance provides some of those tools: how to recognize a scam; who is at risk, and — most important — how to protect yourself.

One of our office's primary functions is protecting New Yorkers from investment and financial fraud. If you believe that you or someone you know has been victimized, call us. We have investigators and prosecutors who specialize in fighting elder financial exploitation. We will do our best to answer your questions and provide the help you need.

Sincerely,

Leticia James
New York Attorney General

Have you or a loved one been targeted by a scam?

[AARP's website](#) has an excellent fraud support section and the NYS Attorney General also has a program called Smart Seniors. These are excellent resources for seniors or anyone who has been targeted. I have a relative who was a victim of a scam and have talked with other seniors who have been victimized. The following information is from the AARP Website and is just a sample of what's available. During this holiday season we all need to be extra vigilant because scams are most prevalent during the holidays.

If you or a loved one has been targeted by a scam or fraud, you are not alone.

Our AARP fraud specialists provide free support and guidance on what to do next.

Common signs of a scam include:

- A phone call asking for money or personal information, such as your Social Security number.
- A request to buy gift cards to pay a purported debt or to send money to someone whom you've only met online.
- An unauthorized charge on your credit card.
- An email or call saying you've won a sweepstakes or lottery, though you don't recall entering one.



Report a scam or fraud if:

- You get a suspicious call, text or email requesting your bank account number; instructing you to buy a gift card; or promising a prize or gift.
- You gave money or financial or medical information to someone whom you now suspect was a scammer.
- A relative or friend gave money or something of value to a suspected scammer.

Our volunteers can offer:

- Tips on how to spot a scam.
- Concrete steps to avoid fraud.
- Actions to take if you have experienced fraud.
- Emotional support from peers who have experienced fraud.
- Guidance for families concerned that a loved one is being targeted by a scammer.
- Referrals to law enforcement and other agencies that investigate fraud.
- The helpline also offers translation services.

The AARP Fraud Watch Network Helpline can be reached at 877-908-3360. Your call helps AARP and our federal, state and community partners to spot trends and respond to emerging threats.

"People who call us, they're our boots on the ground. They're our eyes and ears to what's happening out in the scam world," says Amy Nofziger, director of the Fraud Watch Network Helpline.



Letters to the Editor

Sending letters to the editor is a powerful way for members to get answers to their questions, express their opinions, and contribute to public discourse. They can raise awareness, spark dialogue, and influence public opinion on various issues.

We want to hear from you!

Send your letters to to thecommunicator@pef.org. Please include your name and location. Letters may be published in upcoming issues of *the Communicator*.



Sign up TODAY for the Communicator

Keeping PEF members current on PEF news, emailed to your monthly. Make sure we have your personal email address.

PEF will never email at your work address.

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



Leave donations:

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.

Rhonda Carroll-Eldridge is a dairy products specialist 1 at the Department of Agriculture and Markets in Steuben County.

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.

Heather Farthing is a registered nurse 2 at Capital District Psychiatric Center 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.

Rishona Haynes is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Stony Brook on Long Island.

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.

Joann Loeber is a financial services examiner 4 at the state Department of Financial Services in New York City.

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.

Vexilla Quinlan is a registered nurse 1 at Bronx Psychiatric Center in the Bronx.

Marcus Smith is a health program administrator at the Department of Health in Albany.

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.

Roslyn Williams is an economic development program specialist 2 at the Department of Agriculture and Markets 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 communicator@pef.org, or call 518-785-1900. Be sure to provide your contact information.



December 6, 2023

Thanks to members at the New York State Psychiatric Institute in Manhattan for taking time today to meet with statewide officers and PEF leaders from Division 254 to hear all the latest union updates -- from contract implementation to benefits deadlines to legislative priorities heading into next year!

December 5, 2023

PEF Region 10 and 11 leaders and staff attended an event in support of New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, in New York City.





December 5, 2023

Thanks to PEF Council Leader Carolyn Salafia for inviting statewide officers and PEF staff to the Institute of Basic Research on Staten Island today to talk about the contract, COPE, and organizing initiatives at the PEF Division 345 meeting! The fight from the small, loud voices helps to keep this institution open.



December 3, 2023

At the NYS Public Employee Conference, President Spence spoke about the risk of using predictive algorithms and how congestion pricing will hurt public employees who have to commute into NYC to do their jobs. PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons (in yellow) discussed how the anti-union attacks bankrolled by the Freedom Foundation will harm efforts to Fix Tier 6 of the pension plan if public employees discontinue or don't sign up for union memberships.



December 3, 2023

Region 11 Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor and PAC Chair Charles Roland were honored at an event hosted by New York State Assemblymember Monique Chandler-Waterman on Dec. 3, 2023, in New York City.



November 29, 2023

Division 177 members at DOT Main Office in Albany met for a lunchtime meeting. PEF leaders and staff provided information on the contract, benefits and the importance of being an active part of the union.



December 12, 2023

Board Chair Clarissa Rodriguez was honored to be the keynote speaker at the PEF/State Joint Health and Safety Conference in Saratoga Springs. Joining her for a photo were (L-R): Our Advocate for Injured Workers, Public Employees Federation (Official) Health and Safety Director Geraldine Stella, PEF President Wayne Spence, and the Board's Executive Director Steven Scotti.

