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PEF highlights solutions to short staffing at workforce hearing

President updates membership on contract pay dates, governor's 2024 proposals, and more

Pivotal moments in Black labor history highlight growth, change and solidarity

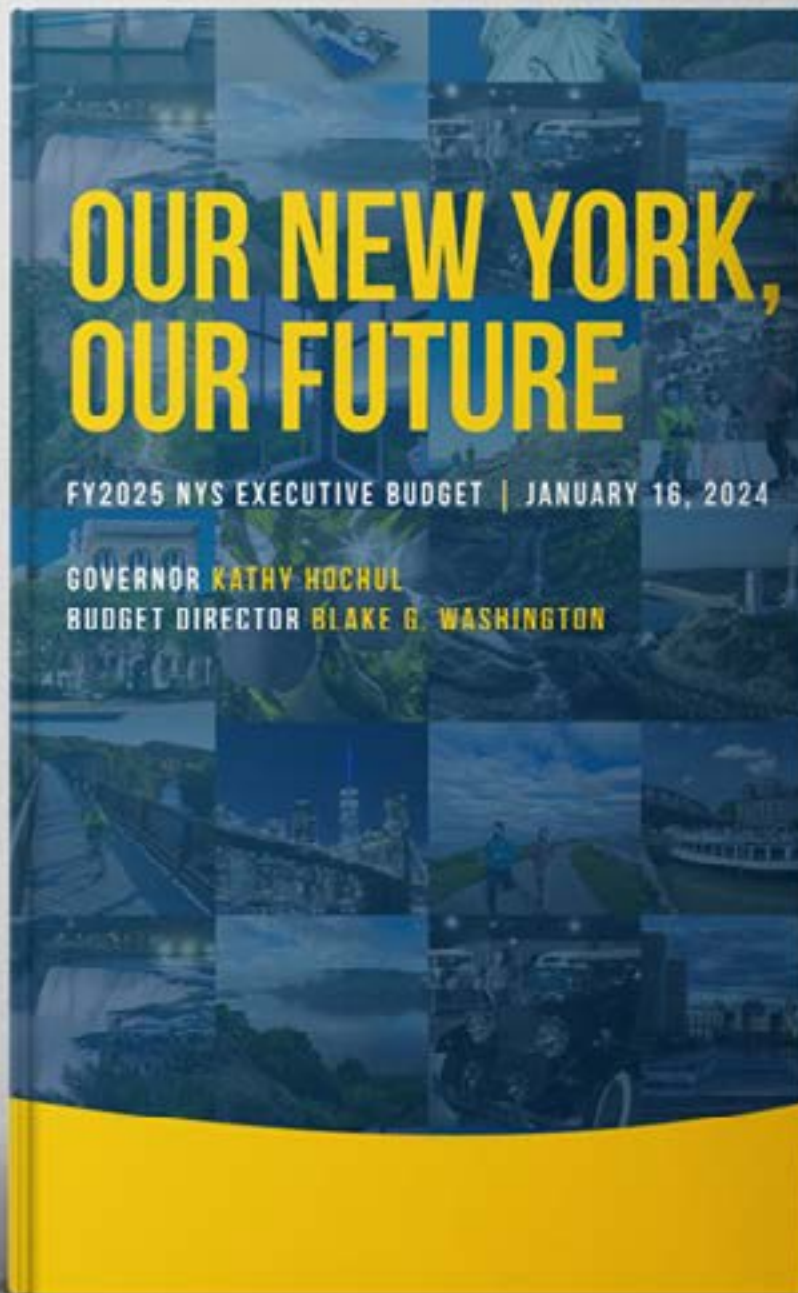


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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



Let the great budget debate begin!

The Legislative Session is in full swing here in Albany, following Governor Hochul's presentation of her Executive Budget proposal last month. Between now and April 1, lawmakers will hold hearings and gather input from stakeholders like PEF as they shape the governor's proposal into something that can pass both the State Senate and Assembly.

PEF's Statewide Political Action Committee finalized the [union's budget priorities](#) this week and we are actively participating in the hearings. Vice President Randi DiAntonio testified on January 30 about the State Workforce, making the point we've made over and over again – that so many of the problems facing New York State agencies stem from short staffing. The State must do everything in its power to attract and retain skilled professionals to deliver the public services promised to its citizens. To that end, we are advocating for three things – increased compensation, pension reform, and workplace culture. Professionals like you need to be well-paid for the work you do, you need to know you'll be taken care of when you retire, and you deserve to work in an environment where you're respected. Please help our Legislative team make the case to your State Senators and Assemblymembers by sending a letter pushing for PEF's priorities, [here](#).

One of those priorities is finding out more about a "transformation plan" that SUNY has put forward to transition many of the services offered by SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn to Kings County Hospital across the street. We have met with SUNY leadership, and they are very aware of how unions like PEF were blindsided by the announcement. It is our position that the staff who work at Downstate, which employs about 400 PEF members and thousands represented by UUP, deserve to have input into any final plan. The heroes who worked at the State's designated Covid-only hospital during the height of the pandemic deserve no less.

We are also keeping a watchful eye on Gov. Hochul's request that the legislature loosen the one-year notice period currently required before the State closes any correctional facilities. She is asking for just 90-days notice. [Vice President Randi DiAntonio attended a rally at the State Capitol this week](#) to represent PEF's view – which is that 90 days is not nearly enough time for staff and their families to plan and make decisions about their future. In addition, we believe there is a good argument for having more space, not less, in today's volatile prison environments.

Finally, February is [Black History Month](#), and so in this issue we look at the critical role Black leaders have played in the labor movement. I am honored to be recognized this month by City & State magazine in their Power of Diversity issue, as well as named to the [Black Power Players](#) list created by PoliticsNY.com and the amMetro NY newspaper. I am proud to lead this union and thank you all for the trust you've placed in me. Please stay safe and always stay union strong!

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President



PEF hits the ground running on 2024 legislative agenda following release of governor’s budget

By **KATE STICKLES**

The PEF Legislative Department completed its initial analysis of Gov. Kathy Hochul’s 2024 Executive Budget, highlighting which proposals the union supports or opposes. The Statewide Political Action Committee is finalizing the priorities this week. Tier 6 pension reform and a proposed bullying law are on top of the “support” list, while stopping prison closures, the design-build program, the interstate nursing compact, and changes to retiree health care top the “oppose” list.

Supporting vital priorities

“We have a busy year ahead of us, with some vital issues outlined in the governor’s budget,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “Everyone knows the state is grossly understaffed and underpaid. Some of our priorities address those issues, like reforming the Tier 6 pension plan and fighting bullying in the workplace. We are

asking members to support us by sending letters and participating in campaigns.”

Public-sector pay and benefits have fallen behind the private sector and New York must take strides to improve benefits to recruit and retain a talented workforce. One way to address this is by improving the Tier 6 pension plan.

Some gains were made in the last legislative session, including reducing the vesting period from 10 years to five and removing overtime worked from 2020 to 2024 from the calculation of employee contributions in Tier 6.

But more must be done. PEF supports reducing employee contributions, increasing the 2% pension factor at 20 years of service,



restoring the final average salary calculation to a three-year window versus the current five-year window, and re-establishing the ability of career employees to retire at age 55 or older with 30 or more years of public service. Taken together, those changes could help the State make meaningful progress towards filling 12,500 vacant positions.

Opposing harmful proposals

“Budget season is also about standing against proposals that will hurt our members and the people they serve,” President Spence said. “We will be educating legislators on the pitfalls and dangers of some legislation, such as prison closures, the design-build proposal, joining the Interstate Nursing Compact, and making unfair changes to retiree health care.”

Currently, a prison closure requires 12-month notice to staff – a proposal in the governor’s budget would reduce that to 90 days, while also authorizing the closure of up to five prisons across the state. PEF maintains 90 days is not enough time and the proposal lacks transparency. Staff who work at facilities targeted for closure deserve to know. Relocation or transfer upends lives and arrangements can’t reasonably be made in three months. In addition, the space in less populated prisons affords staff some protection. Consolidating more incarcerated individuals into fewer prisons would remove that barrier.

The Interstate Nursing Compact 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, who get paid more than full-time nurses but often do not have the same level of skill or experience. Additionally, there is a shortage of nurses across the country and the compact takes nurses from other states facing the same issue. Finally, there is no evidence in states that participate in the compact that patient outcomes are better; that staff-to-patient ratios are better, or that the over-reliance on existing staff has decreased.

Design-build allows a single contractor to design, construct and inspect an entire project, as opposed to the traditional design-bid-build process, which provides for a separation of the design and build portions. Design-build bypasses competitive bidding laws, labor protections, transparency fairness and impartial oversight. PEF maintains it is not cost-effective; benefits only a handful of large construction companies, most from outside of New York state; and could even lead to serious public safety issues in the future.

PEF is also prioritizing opposition to the Income Related Monthly Adjusted Amount (IRMAA), which would eliminate the state reimbursement for Medicare Part B premiums for retirees and dependents in the New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP). The proposal would greatly impact retirees who dedicated their lives to public service and are now on fixed incomes.

Reaching legislators on key issues

PEF representatives continue to participate in joint Legislative budget hearings on a variety of topics, either in person or via written testimony. PEF leaders have already testified at hearings on health, public protection, and the workforce. A list of hearing dates and times can be found [here](#). The hearings are live streamed.

Getting PEF issues in front of legislators is vital to achieving change in the best interests of members. That’s why PEF is asking members and their friends and family to participate in a [letter-writing campaign](#).

Campaigns include opposition to fast tracking closure of state prisons; fighting back against transitioning services out of SUNY Downstate; stopping the expansion of the design-build program; cleaning up toxic workplaces; fixing New York’s Tier 6 pension plan; rejecting increasing health care costs for retirees; and advocating for skilled nursing care for state retirees.

“Together, our collective voices really do make a difference,” said President Spence. “If you read the PEF ‘Fund our Future’ campaign literature, you will see that many of our ideas were once again incorporated in the budget. Her budget book is even emblazoned with the words, ‘Our New York, Our Future.’”

This year PEF is also hosting a Legislative Reception on February 13 in Albany, where leaders and staff will share PEF’s 2024 Legislative Agenda, which is focused on ways to help the state attract and retain the professionals needed to deliver quality public services.

“Speaking face-to-face with our elected officials helps us drive home the importance of these issues,” President Spence said. “In-person interaction allows for a back-and-forth dialogue, where legislators can ask questions and get real insight into our proposals.”



PEF highlights solutions to short staffing at workforce hearing

By **NAJEE WALKER**

During a joint legislative hearing on Workforce Development and Labor issues held on January 30 in Albany, PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio presented lawmakers with viable solutions to the staffing shortages impacting every state agency.

DiAntonio thanked the Governor and the legislature for recent civil service reforms and for the proposals in this year's executive budget to address ending the Lag Payroll and Salary Withholding Program. They are both steps that could help the state hire more staff to fill more than 11,000 vacancies.

"The challenge we face is that the state remains unable to attract and retain the staff it needs to deliver services," DiAntonio told the panel. "This is evidenced by the continued closure of group homes across the state at OPWDD, the proposed closure of state correctional facilities without a clear plan and in a quick fashion, the challenges around wage theft and enforcement responsibilities, and the fact that state employees worked 22 million hours of overtime at a cost of \$1.35 billion in 2022."

According to a report from the Comptroller, the state lost 10,000 staff in 2022 — an increase of more than 40% since 2020 — all due to attrition, not retirement.

DiAntonio asked the legislative body to consider common-sense solutions to help. While PEF awaits the results of a Civil Service study of all titles in an effort to make public service jobs more competitive with the private sector, the union believes that fixing Tier 6 of the pension plan, cleaning up toxic workplace cultures, and ending the decentralization of human resources functions in the State, will help.

Tier 6 is one of the top priorities for PEF and many other unions. A rock-solid pension was once a massive incentive to pursue a career in the public sector and it can be again. PEF believes that there is sufficient funding to improve Tier 6 based on the fact that the State spent more than \$1 billion on overtime in 2022 and annually spends another \$1 billion on outside consulting contracts for work that PEF members can perform. PEF testified that the state needs to consider reducing employee pension contributions; reducing the final average salary calculation to 3 years versus the current 5 years; increasing the pension factor to 2% at 20 years; and adding a retirement option at age 55 when employees have 30 or more years of service.

On the compensation front, PEF is not waiting for the results of the Civil Service study to advocate for salary reallocations and restructuring for certain titles.

"Studies are great, but they take too long, people aren't going to wait for them," DiAntonio said.

She focused on social workers, tax auditors and open positions at the Department of Labor in her testimony, especially when it comes to making sure positions are offered a competitive salary.

"We have many titles that have advanced degrees where the private sector pays a lot more," she said. "The balance used to be the pension and the healthcare benefits. As those things have diminished, we cannot compete."

At the Department of Labor, there has been a drop of about 21% of the workforce, with many leaving due to low pay. Legislators concerned about the costs of paying to bolster the workforce, DiAntonio said, need only look at their own legislation.

"We know there is legislation that has been put forward to create a mechanism to fund the DOL by making sure we find those bad actors," she said. "Let's make sure those fines that are levied are returned to the DOL to fund wage enforcement."

Even with the implementation of the [HELPS program](#) implemented by the Department of Civil Service and the successful hiring of 7,000 new state employees, retention remains an issue. Many PEF members are tempted to seek employment elsewhere when they see their agencies unable to efficiently serve New Yorkers due to staffing shortages.

"With the onset of telehealth and tele-med, many medical professionals can not only work elsewhere, they can be paid higher amounts of money, they can remote work," DiAntonio said. "There's all sorts of options that the state hasn't really pursued as much."

DiAntonio also called on legislators to consider not only investments into workers, but the places they work. It is important to PEF members that they have a safe place to work, and that includes the actual infrastructure.

"The physical buildings where people work are, in many cases, unsafe and falling apart," she said.

As her testimony wrapped up, DiAntonio offered one last critical common-sense solution: Reform the hiring system itself. Even if the State fixes Tier 6, increases all salary grades, and reinvests in its workforce, New York's hiring process is too slow.

"By the time someone gets information about a position, takes an exam, gets called back and offered a position, they've already found three other jobs," she said. "The HELP program to us is a temporary stop gap. It is not the answer to all our problems."


The answer, PEF believes, is paying public employees close to on-par with what they can make in the private sector, coupled with an attractive pension, solid benefits, and a good work-life balance. That was a formula that worked in the past and the union believes it can again if State lawmakers are willing to make the necessary changes.



Watch PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio's testimony starting at about 2:31:20.

Stay up to date on PEF Legislative Testimony on our [PAC page](#)

[Send an email](#) to your local lawmaker supporting PEF priorities



President updates membership on contract pay dates, governor's 2024 proposals, and more

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF President Wayne Spence and department directors updated members on recent news that would impact SUNY Downstate members, the proposed congestion pricing in the New York City area, when to expect payment of contract benefits, PEF's campaign to end workplace bullying, and the union's legislative priorities during a telephone town hall January 17.

Contractual pay

The 2023-26 contract includes several financial gains for members and Director of Contract Administration Deb Greenberg provided updates on when that money pays out.

The largest, the April 2023 3% raise, was paid out within weeks of ratification, she said. The next largest, the \$3,000 signing bonus, was paid in November 2023, within a month of the eligibility period cutoff.

For members eligible for the \$1,000 increased hiring rate payments, those are being paid out starting in the January 17 and January 25 checks, depending on administrative or institutional payroll. These are payment for members in titles where Civil Service approved increased hiring rates and who were already above that salary and below job rate.

The first \$400 annual dental stipend will be paid March 13 and March 21, and the stipend for 2024 should be paid as soon as practical after the beginning of the April 2024 fiscal year and after the required eligibility lists are generated. Members enrolled in the dental plan do not need to take any action to receive the stipends.

The first \$600 higher education differential is due to be paid as soon as practicable after the beginning of the April 2024 fiscal year. Agencies will need to provide information to the Comptroller on who is eligible. Members have until the end of March 2024 to submit proof, if needed, of their college degree (Associate's Degree or higher or professional license from SED). Agencies may rely on information in personal history folders. Be on the lookout for direction from agency HR departments on what proof may be required.

Insurance premium increase

You may have noticed your health insurance costs increased for the new year.

Greenberg explained this was not due to anything PEF negotiated, but due to an increase in NYSHIP premiums.

"We don't negotiate those," she said. "The increase was not specific to PEF and not specific to NYSHIP. Costs are rising all over the country. We negotiate the percentage of premium, and that did not change."

SUNY Downstate

Once again, the state is targeting SUNY Downstate, this time citing financial difficulties and aging infrastructure in a proposal to create a SUNY wing at Kings County Hospital across the street, while rehabbing Downstate into affordable housing.

"A memo came out that raised a lot of questions for folks who work at SUNY Downstate," said President Spence. "What does this mean for the 400 PEF members, as well as the UUP and the CSEA staff at the hospital?"

"I want our nurses to know we are looking into this," he said. "We are going to demand more information on this plan. We want you to know there are a lot of concerns around this announcement."

PEF Legislative Director Pat Lyons said there is very little in the Executive Budget on this, but capital improvements are necessary to maintain operational need.

"We are going to work in a coordinated fashion with other unions," he said. "This isn't only a PEF issue; it impacts the residents of Brooklyn. They get excellent health care at SUNY Downstate."

You can support the opposition efforts by contacting your legislators. [Click here for a pre-written letter.](#)



Congestion pricing

It's expensive enough traveling into Manhattan for work, but a new congestion pricing plan would make it even more so.

"They want to charge drivers who travel into designated zones during peak traffic hours," President Spence said. "This would have a direct impact on PEF members who normally drive their vehicle into parts of Manhattan. Whatever raise we just got, that is going to be eaten up."

The idea behind congestion pricing is to encourage people to use public transportation. The problem is that there are numerous "transit deserts" where that is neither feasible nor reliable.

"If you want the privilege of driving, you have to pay extra," he said. "We're going to be monitoring this."

The United Federation of Teachers and the governor of New Jersey have filed lawsuits against the city to halt the plan.

TOXIC

Toxic workplace campaign

PEF launched a campaign over the summer to combat toxic workplace environments at state agencies, kicking off with a [rally](#) at Empire State Plaza during the September 2023 Executive Board meeting.

As more members come forward with their stories, others have been empowered to share their own. To avoid retaliation, PEF is protecting the identity of participants by blurring their images and masking their voices.

President Spence highlighted the actions of members at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center, where thanks to members speaking out and with the backing of the union, progress was made.

"Members started sending anonymous letters about their experiences of bullying and disrespect," said Vice President Darlene Williams. We made the decision to package these and show them to OMH Central Office.

"What really stood out was that one member stood up at a meeting," Williams said. "She was scared and in tears and she told her story. That allowed someone else to stand up. Letters were no longer anonymous."

PEF put forth a demand letter and OMH responded that they will meet with local leaders.

"Management is now paying attention in a way they didn't pay attention before," President Spence said. "When I started this, I didn't know where it was going to go, but I did know we can't just sit there and do nothing."

To share your toxic workplace tale, visit the [campaign's website](#) or email communicator@pef.org.

State budget analysis

Highlights of Gov. Kathy Hochul's FY 2025 budget were released January 16 and PEF's Legislative Department hit the ground running to analyze it.

"We're pretty pleased with the budget," said Legislative Director Pat Lyons. "There are some good proposals that we have been supportive of in our Fund Our Future campaign, such as adding mental health beds. The governor also advanced a plan to eliminate the lag payroll system for new hires."

There are also some problem spots, he said, including SUNY Downstate and a proposal to shutter up to five prisons in the next fiscal year, with only a 90-day notice to staff.

"The incarcerated population has dropped by half over the last decade," Lyons said. "There is a lot of excess capacity. We believe that space is a buffer, and our concerns include making sure our members are safe."

Should the closings occur, PEF contends 90 days is not sufficient to make sure members have options to transfer to other facilities or other positions.

Lyons said the campaign to fix the Tier 6 pension plan will continue in this legislative session. Among the goals is a 3% standard contribution for all workers, a 2% pension calculation at 20 years; reducing the retirement age to 55 with 30 years of service; and reducing the salary calculation to the average of the three highest years of a member's salary.

Accrual loss

Members amassed excess accruals during the COVID pandemic – and the end date to use those carried-over accruals was Dec. 31, 2023.

"It was use it or lose it," President Spence said. "Because of staff shortages, we knew if everyone put in for it there was no way everybody was going to get the days off, especially around the holidays."

If you put in for vacation, were denied, and lost accruals after the first of the year, contact PEF at AccrualLoss@pef.org. The union will attempt to get you compensated. You will need documentation of the denial and your timesheet showing the accrual loss.

To see a breakdown of what else was discussed during the Town Hall and when – as well as listen to an audio recording of the call – [click here](#). PEF President Spence promised to hold another Town Hall in February.



Pivotal moments in Black labor history highlight growth, change and solidarity

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Throughout the history of the labor movement in the United States, there are moments when Black workers, fed up with working conditions, lack of benefits and low pay, took steps to not only create new unions, but lead labor in the fight to secure better quality of life for workers.

One of the first unions to exist solely for Black workers formed in 1869. Despite then National Labor Union (NLU) President William Sylvis agreeing that there should be “no distinction of race or nationality” within the union, many unions still excluded Black workers. Several Black delegates attended the annual meeting of the NLU in 1869 to speak for solidarity and ask white members and Black members to fight together. When white members refused to see them as equals, the Colored National Labor Union was formed, with Isaac Myers as its first president.

Despite their hard work trying to improve the lives of their members, as well as petitioning Congress to assist Black farmers in the South, the CNLU eventually disbanded and became more of a political entity than a labor union. However, their work to show the strength of Black workers helped to advance the cause of labor union desegregation.

The Knights of Labor was one of the first unions to not only open to Black and women workers in the United States, but also the first to understand that excluding certain workers could give employers a tool to undermine the union and build that solidarity into their strategy. In 1886, about 75,000 Knights members were Black or a woman, making accounting for about 10% of the membership.

Although many predominantly Black unions had risen and fallen over the years, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, led in 1925 by A. Philip Randolph, was the largest union of Black members to receive a charter from the American Federation of Labor (AFL), now known as the AFL-CIO.

Randolph was a well-established labor leader and fought for more than 40 years on behalf of workers. His most important work as part of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was to make sure that as America entered World War II in the 1940s, Black workers were able to find work in factories and at shipyards. As a result of threatening a march on Washington, D.C., of 50,000 Black workers to protest exclusion from production jobs, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which banned “discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”

President Roosevelt also established the Fair Employment Practices Committee to enforce the order. Though the committee would later be dissolved by Congress, it laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission following the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Today, after many mergers over the years, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is part of what is now known as the Transportation Communications Union (TCU).

For his part, Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged and supported more than 1,000 Black workers from the Memphis Department of Public Workers when they went on strike in 1968. The strike was spurred on by the death of two Memphis garbage collectors, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, who were crushed to death by a malfunctioning truck. Despite petitions and actions to try and remove the malfunctioning trucks and otherwise improve workplace safety, the then mayor of Memphis, Henry Loeb, refused nearly every request by the workers.

King rallied with the sanitation workers throughout the duration of the strike, which lasted from February to April of 1968. Some of the protests became violent due to outside actors and Mayor Loeb responded by calling on the National Guard. Still, King held to the movement, and on April 3, 1968, he delivered his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address to the workers.

The following evening, April 4, 1968, Dr. King was assassinated. In response to the unrest in Memphis and Mayor Loeb’s stubborn attempts to block the union, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson tasked Undersecretary of Labor James Reynolds with negotiating on behalf of the union and the mayor to end the strike.

With the help of Reynolds, and 42,000 silent protestors led by King’s wife, Coretta Scott King, success was finally within reach. Loeb and the Memphis City Council reached a deal with the union to recognize it and guarantee better wages for workers on April 16, 1968.

This Black History Month, PEF remembers these moments and realizes our movement stands on the shoulders of Black labor leaders who paved the way. We must heed the words of U.S. Representative Yvette Clarke, who said during Black History Month: “We must never forget that Black History is American History. The achievements of African Americans have contributed to our nation’s greatness.”



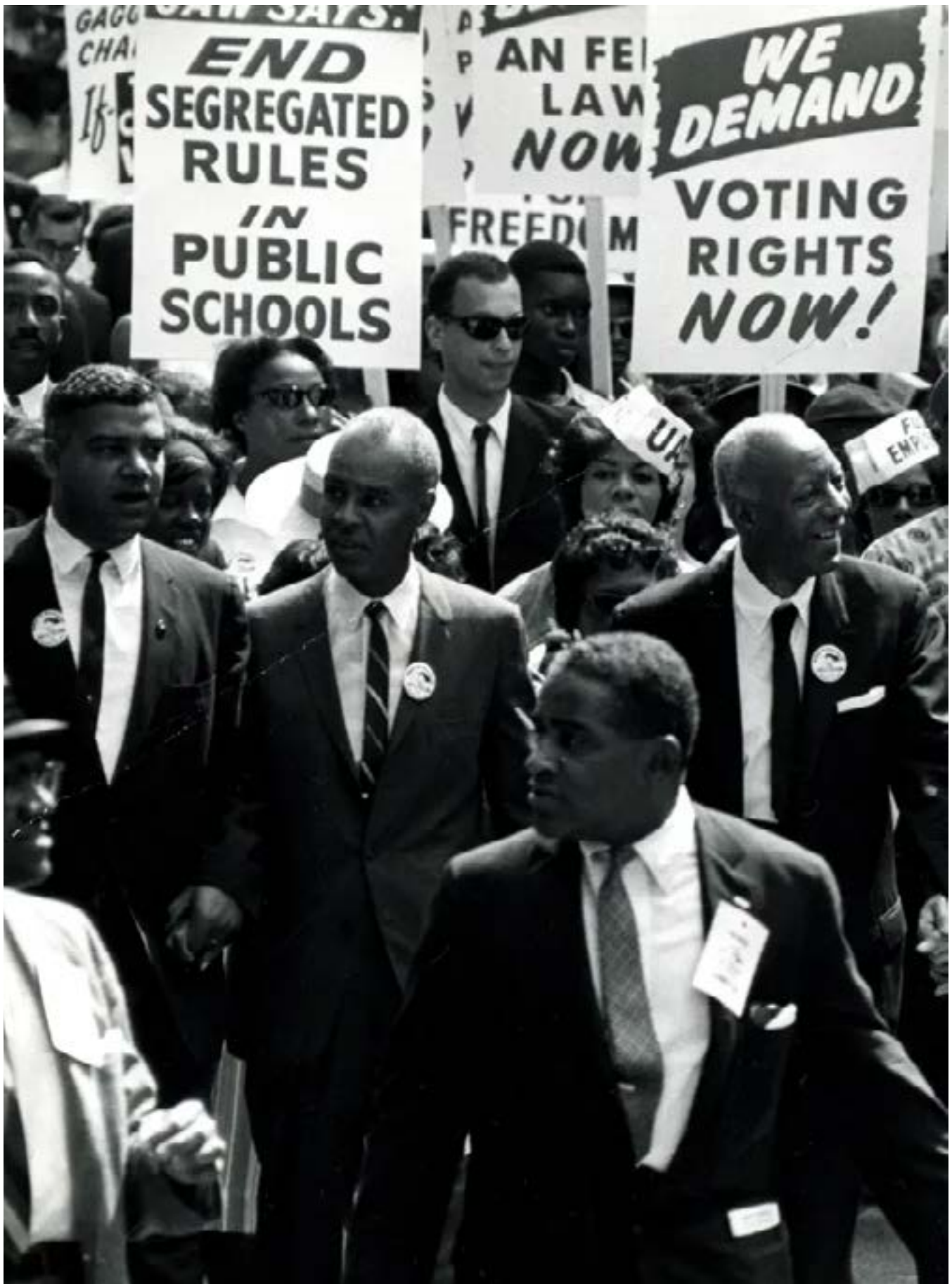


Image source: newsone.com



PEF Research Associate Jean-Rene Shekerjian, front right, testifies at a Department of Civil Service hearing on Jan. 18, 2024.

Expansion of HELP program is a small step to address staffing issues

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Positions in nearly every state agency are in dire need of filling – more than 12,000 in all, according to the governor’s most recent Executive Budget proposal. To help agencies fill positions with a diverse pool of applicants, the Department of Civil Service (DCS) [launched the Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Program, also known as “HELP,”](#) on April 5, 2023. As part of the program, the Civil Service exam for certain titles is temporarily waived. DCS says more than 6,500 people have been hired since HELP was launched.

Now DCS wants to expand the program. On January 18, during a hearing with agencies and unions, the Department of Civil Service announced NY HELPS, with the intention of streamlining appointments to all open-competitive positions.

PEF was present at the hearing and voiced support for NY HELPS but urged caution about relying on it as a fix to the larger staffing issue the state faces.

“To PEF, Civil Service protections are so critical, not only to PEF’s members, but critical to the public, and critical to the individuals served by agencies,” said Research Associate Jean-Rene Shekerjian, who testified at the hearing, representing the PEF Civil Service Enforcement and Research department. “We have concerns that as Civil Service protections are made more flexible, there are more opportunities for harm to be done.”

As a result, PEF President Wayne Spence made sure DCS placed a one-year time limit on the program. President Spence supports NY HELPS as a means to lighten the workload on PEF members who are overworked, and to adequately staff understaffed agencies. However, without a clear time limit, President Spence was concerned that the program would weaken ongoing efforts to protect existing State employees and PEF members.

For PEF and President Spence, it is not only open-competitive positions that need focus, but promotional positions as well. President Spence was able to reach an agreement with DCS to make

sure that vacant positions which could be filled via promotional lists of current employees were given first consideration ahead of any individuals outside of the State workforce.

“We felt very strongly that our members needed to be assured that if there were sufficient numbers of them in the promotion field that the agency would have to go to the promotion field first [before appointing someone who was not in the promotion field],” Shekerjian said. “We’re grateful that we were able to work out an agreement that we believe will protect our members.”

Even with the NY HELPS program, PEF believes that in addition to hiring, retention must be high on DCS’ radar because both are caused by the lack of competitive salaries. The governor and legislature called for a study to examine pay grades across all State titles, which DCS is in the process of sending out to bid, and which PEF believes will provide enough data to merit a two-grade increase for all positions.

But beyond that, Shekerjian said, there are ways for the State to increase compensation without a lengthy period of review.

“The previous administration, we believe, was much too strict in limiting the salaries paid for these positions and we think it has had a very detrimental effect,” Shekerjian said. “PEF encourages the Department of Civil Service to seriously consider approving many more Geographic Pay Differentials and Increased Hiring Rates.”

In addition to measures that will increase PEF members’ compensation, President Spence is focused on making sure Tier 6 reform is on the table as well. Even with changes to pay and waived exams, President Spence believes that improving the current tier of the State pension is crucial to attracting and retaining skilled professionals. PEF is advocating for employee pension contributions to be standardized at 3%.



Lastly, President Spence's push to define workplace bullying and clean up toxic workplaces should help the State hire new people and keep the ones they have. The idea is simple — workers are more likely to stay in jobs where they are treated fairly and see a ladder they can climb for career success.

To that end, there is a call for regional testing centers to be properly staffed and supported. As part of legislation passed last year, 12 computerized testing centers are planned to be opened across the state. However, there still needs to be more staff at these centers, as well as a modernization of exams.

This requires adequate staffing at DCS as well. In 2001, Civil Service employed nearly 700 people. At the start of 2023, there were only 357 DCS staffers.

Video: [Watch](#) the Jan. 18 Department of Civil Service hearing (PEF testimony begins at about 23:00)



Have student loans? See if this consolidation extension applies to you!

The U.S. Department of Education extended the deadline to consolidate federal student loans to receive the full benefit of the current Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) adjustment from to April 30, 2024.

If you have older loans issued through the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) you now have until April to consolidate those loans to receive full retroactive credit for all payments made to date.

There is also a benefit for loan holders who took out federal loans several years apart.

By consolidating before the April 30 deadline, your new consolidation loan will be credited with the payment count of the loan you included with the highest number of payments.

For example, if you consolidate two loans, one with 104 payments and a second with 55 payments, the resulting consolidation loan will be credited with 104 payments.

Visit the student loan counseling section of the PEF Membership Benefits [website](#) for more information.



PEF VP Randi DiAntonio advocated at the State Capitol this week, asserting that a 90-day notice for prison closures is insufficient for staff and their families to plan and decide their future.

PEF attends rally opposing 90-day prison closures

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Governor Hochul proposed in her executive budget that the legislature give her approval to close up to five New York State correctional facilities with just 90-days' notice. That would be a drastic change from the current statute, which requires 12-months' notice.

At a rally held at the State Capitol on January 31 and organized by Assemblyman Chris Tague, PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio spoke against fast-tracking any closures.

"Staffing is a problem at every agency across the state," DiAntonio said. "Instead of proposing closures, why don't we propose ways to bolster recruitment and retention?"

Low staffing levels at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) are at least part of the reason why up to five facilities could be closed. PEF represents employees at

correctional facilities who provide vocational, habilitation, medical and mental health services.

DiAntonio said that the fast-track closure of these facilities is disruptive, not only to staff and PEF members, but also to communities and the incarcerated population as well.

"The governor's proposal to go from 12 months to 90-days is unnecessary, it is ill-conceived, it is ill-advised," she said. "Fast tracking these decisions hurts the staff, it hurts the incarcerated population, it hurts their treatment and rehabilitation regimen."

There are safety concerns as well.

"Moving hundreds of the incarcerated population into other settings is going to create overcrowding," DiAntonio said. "We already know that it increases assaults, and it increases violence."



"PEF members are dedicated to improving outcomes for New Yorkers," she said. "They can work in a lot of other settings. They choose to work with this population because they care, but they're not going to come to work if they don't feel safe and the State is not going to be able to recruit and retain skilled professionals. People are not going to come into a job that they think they're going to lose in 90 days."

PEF asks all concerned members to sign on to its [letter-writing campaign opposing the fast-track closures](#).



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Photo credit: www.governor.ny.gov

Governor Hochul’s State of the State message: The Future is Bright

By **NAJEE WALKER**

During her State of the State address on January 9, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul told a joint session of assemblymembers, state senators and other government officials and guests that New York is on the rise.

“The state of New York is strong,” Hochul said. “Stronger today than when I became governor two years ago. Healthier. Safer. More affordable.”

Hochul began by praising the work of her administration and the legislature coming together in 2023 to lower unemployment from 7.4 percent to 4 percent, creating 600,000 jobs across the state, raising funding for education by \$5.3 billion, healthcare by \$112 billion and investing \$7 billion into childcare.

[The State of the State book](#) details 204 policy initiatives intended to address many of the concerns raised by New Yorkers. In her address, the governor focused on her “key priorities” for New York: Fighting crime, fixing New York’s mental health system, and protecting consumers.

Many of the proposals reflected PEF priorities as outlined in the union’s “Fund Our Future” campaign.

For example, PEF is focused on pushing New York state to establish an Acceptable Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy, expanding the number of mental health beds offered by state-operated institutions, expanding the Department of Labor’s ability to

enforce wage theft, developing apprenticeships programs for state employees, extending the Nurse Loan Forgiveness program, and addressing services available to parolees and protecting against high-risk parolees.

“If government can’t keep New Yorkers safe, nothing else matters,” Governor Hochul said. “In the last year we’ve reduced gun violence, bringing shootings down by more than a third across the state.”

Governor Hochul cited mental health as being a large part of New Yorkers’ concerns. While New Yorkers are concerned about their safety, the governor said that access is key.

“High quality care must be widely available, accessible, and affordable. Yet for decades, our mental health system was deprioritized and defunded,” Governor Hochul said. “Over the 10 years before I took office, funding for mental health grew only 2 percent. Not even keeping up with inflation.”

PEF is advocating for \$10 million in the next budget to hire more staff at OMH and OASAS who can provide immediate, on-site evaluation of individuals who present for treatment. Additionally, PEF believes the State should spend \$30 million to restore the more than 120 residential facilities for the developmentally disabled that have been shuttered by OPWDD over the past several years.

The governor detailed expanding consumer protection laws, including protecting students from predatory student loan practices



and manipulative debt collectors. She also focused on medical debt and increases to disability leave, which have not seen any increases in 35 years.

“What’s the point of paying for this benefit your entire life if it only provides a fraction of what you need to recover?” said Governor Hochul. “We must right this wrong and increase this benefit from the paltry \$170 a week people get right now to as much as \$1,250. That’s seven times more than what it has been, and I say it’s about time.”

On the jobs front, the governor announced a new consortium comprised of academic institutions like Cornell, RPI and NYU, that will be geared toward making New York a leader in Artificial Intelligence research and development. The consortium, dubbed Empire AI, will work to create and launch an AI computing center in Upstate New York. The governor believes that AI can be used to help bolster the way we live, including helping to protect against environmental disaster, helping to diagnose illness, and more.

PEF is concerned with the use of AI and its impact on the State workforce, especially in the public sector. PEF Executive Board members and ITS employees Christopher Ford and Prakash Lal [testified on the impact of artificial intelligence on the state workforce in November](#).

The governor also remains focused on new programming to attract and retain State workers to fill the more than 12,000 vacancies in state agencies. PEF will continue to advocate for improvements to Tier 6 of the pension plan as a key incentive for employees to make a career out of working for New York State. In addition, PEF will advocate for new legislation to address inappropriate conduct in the workplace by defining bullying and requiring training of employees and employers to clean up toxic workplaces.

For her final message to New Yorkers, Governor Hochul urged them to stay optimistic. The future of New York is bright.

“We are a state where resiliency runs in our blood. No mountain is too steep to summit. Our strength is forged from the diversity and industry of our people. We succeed because of our contrasts, our amazing differences. We know we are more powerful together than on our own. It’s fascinating that our great state could be home to the world’s leading financial institutions and the tiny Mom and Pop shops that dot the Main Streets of charming villages.”

Governor Hochul’s State of the State message: The Future is Bright

Download: [State of the State Book](#)





A banner year for COPE

By **NAJEE WALKER**

In 2023, PEF contributions to COPE – the Committee on Political Education, a political action fund administered by PEF’s parent unions, SEIU and AFT — increased by 21% over 2022, and the number of contributors rose almost 11% from 2,401 to 2,658.

“This is a significant accomplishment,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “Despite how far the labor movement has come, even in 2024 Social Security is under attack, Medicare is under attack, and your right to be a union leader is under attack. These fights need to happen at the federal level.”

Since PEF is a state union, COPE is the only way funds are allocated for lobbying and other political efforts on the federal level. Union dues cannot be used for federal elections, but members and retirees may contribute to COPE via voluntary payroll or pension deductions.

Federal funds are vital to the work of multiple agencies, such as the Department of Labor, which is comprised of almost 100% federally funded positions; Medicaid services at the Office of Mental Health, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Health, SUNY hospitals, to name some; and the Department of Transportation, which is supported by federal infrastructure.

“It is critically important for all members to support our ability to make a difference at the federal level,” said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio, who chairs the PEF Statewide Political Action Committee. “Contributing to COPE is part of being an active union member. Our strength is always in our numbers and the more COPE contributors we bring to the table, the greater our voice.”

“Together 50,000 members, alongside 20,000 retirees, can make a difference,” said PEF COPE Coordinator Don Morgenstern, who travels the state talking to members about the importance of COPE. “We don’t ask for much, \$5 per pay period, just what amounts to a cup of coffee a week. Let’s see if we can make 2024 our best COPE year yet!”

For more information about COPE or to invite Don to talk to your region or division, email COPE@pef.org or visit the [COPE page online](#).





Photo credit: wdiny.org

PEF families may qualify for child-care scholarship

Members who meet eligibility criteria can apply for the [Workforce Development Institute's Child Care Scholarship Program](#), which provides financial support for working families to help cover childcare costs.

"The average cost of childcare for a family with two children is over \$30,000 per year, forcing families to make hard economic decisions," WDI states. "When families spend less on childcare, they can better afford housing and transportation, pay student loans and other bills, and make healthier choices for increased nutrition for everyone in the household."

The average monthly scholarship of \$1,000 per child is paid directly to providers for full-time care. Applicants and co-applicants must be working or in an education or training program at least 10 hours per week.

There is limited funding available through March 31, 2024, and limited capacity by region. Applicants can complete an [eligibility pre-screen](#) to see if they qualify – those that do will be sent an application.

The WDI scholarship is available in specific regions outside of New York City, as follows: Long Island, Lower Hudson Valley, Hudson Valley, Capital Region, North Country, Mohawk Valley, CNY, RGV, and WNY.

Questions? Email scholarship@wdiny.org.

PEF secures a win for hourly members who received incorrect prorated bonuses

By **KATE STICKLES**

When Executive Board member Mickey Dobbin from the State Education Department (SED) reached out to PEF with the news that hourly employees at SED had received improperly prorated contract signing bonuses, the union investigated and then filed a class-action grievance with the State Office of Employee Relations (OER).

“The grievance has yielded positive discussions with OER,” President Wayne Spence said. “As a result of those discussions, some impacted members at SED have already received additional pay to make up the difference caused by the improper proration.”

Hourly employees at SED work a full 37.5-hour agency schedule, but their bonuses were prorated based on a 40-hour workweek.

“I was an hourly employee at SED myself for a long time and ran to be a steward as an hourly employee with the express intention of bringing our unique concerns and issues to PEF,” Dobbin said. Now a Civil Service employee, Dobbin says he would not have been aware of the issue if his members hadn’t come to him. “One of my coworkers noticed it was not adding up and alerted me to the issue, which I quickly discovered all the other hourly employees in my office had.”

That member was Steven Moragne, who discovered the discrepancy when he received the bonus deposit and it didn’t match what he had calculated when creating a household budget.

“I had a ‘back-of-the-envelope’ idea of what the net figure would be,” he said. “When the direct deposit came in and my math was off by more than \$100, I went to Payroll Online to check the stub and try to figure out where my error was. I could see right away that the number was off from what we had been contracted to receive and a quick check against the promised \$3,000 showed that it was off by 6.25% – the exact difference between 37.5 and 40 hours.”

Realizing it was likely not unique to him, he contacted his steward.

“I contacted Mickey to let him know while also asking some of my colleagues in the same position to confirm,” he said. “Mickey took it from there.”

Moragne said he was off-site in Western New York when he noted the error and had it not been for his union, it wouldn’t have been easy to pursue the issue.

“Even if I knew the right people to contact, I doubt I would have had the bandwidth to deal with this on my own,” he said. “Notifying Mickey and having PEF carry the weight from there meant I didn’t have to.”



As an Executive Board member, Dobbin said he was able to take the issue directly to PEF staff in the Contract Administration Department.

“I saw the possibility that this issue could be happening in any state agency with a 37.5-hour workweek, and hopefully any other PEF members who are hourly can have their bonus made whole,” he said. “Whether you are a grade 14 or a grade 29, in a Civil Service title, or provisional or hourly, the union is here for you, your local stewards and leaders are here for you, your field reps are here for you, and we will fight and advocate for you.”

PEF provided payroll documentation from other state agencies indicating this problem occurred beyond SED. OER is reviewing that documentation and providing guidance to agencies to rectify the payments.

Anyone paid on an hourly, part-time or per diem basis who believes their \$3,000 signing bonus was improperly prorated should reach out to their field representative. A list of regional offices can be found [here](#).

PEF in the News



Brooklyn Eagle links to PEF article on SUNY Downstate

The Brooklyn Eagle included [a brief on the SUNY Downstate “transformation” plan](#), including a comment by President Spence and linking to [PEF’s full statement](#) on our website.

New York Amsterdam News quotes President Spence on Downstate

President Spence spoke with the newspaper about the “transformation” plans for SUNY Downstate, highlighting the hospital’s financial woes from years of underfunding. Read the story [here](#).



International Money Fund (IMF) mirrors PEF views on AI

In its [blog, the IMF urges oversight of artificial intelligence](#) (AI) and discusses the impact AI could have on the workforce, from loss of jobs for low-income workers to being a resource for professionals. [PEF leaders Christopher Ford and Prakash Lal testified](#) before a joint state committee in Oct. 2023 and shared the union’s recommendations regarding regulation and oversight of AI.



PEF helps honor Worker Protection Staff

President Wayne Spence was quoted in the Governor’s press release on the second Division of Worker Protection enforcement staff shield ceremony on January 30 in Albany. The enforcement unit upholds and enforces state and federal labor law.

[Click here for more.](#)



Albany news covers testimony on workforce

The Times Union ran an extensive story on the workforce shortage, quoting President Spence’s testimony submitted to the legislature during Executive Budget hearings outlining PEF’s proposals to boost staffing through Tier 6 fixes and addressing bullying and toxic work environments.

[Click here for the story.](#)



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Upcoming social worker, counselor PSWP trainings

Get a jump on your professional development and education this year with Public Service Workshop Program training courses secured through your contract. Article 15 of the PS&T contract provides money for training courses, grants, reimbursement for workshops and licensure exam fees.

These workshops fill fast, so visit the [website](#) for a full slate of courses.

If you have questions about any of the Article 15 programs, contact Training Specialist Kim Loccisano at Kim.Loccisano@PEF.org.

A Union Family: Christopher and Anne Jordan

Husband and wife, Christopher and Anne Jordan, are a strong example of a union family – both serving their PEF Divisions and their coworkers as union leaders.

How long have you been a PEF member?

Anne: I have been a PEF member since Nov. 11, 2015, previously I was 10-plus years with NYSOPBA.

Chris: I have been with PEF since I started with the state on Oct. 18, 2007.

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

Anne: Locally I help my members at Division 324 to ensure they have a safe work environment; I keep them up to date on PEF news; and I answer all their questions. I plan a monthly women's hike every first Sunday of the month for PEF Region 3, but it is open to any PEF members and their families and friends.

Chris: I have worked for DOT my entire time with the state, 10 years as a highway designer. Now I work in Traffic Safety & Mobility where I conduct safety audits of highways, and ensure signs, signals, and guide rails are up to state and federal standards.

What position(s) do you hold in PEF?

Anne: I am a union leader/steward for Division 324 Groveland Correctional Facility; I am on the PEF Women's Committee for Region 3; I am a Political Action Committee member for Division 324; and I am a Convention delegate.

Chris: I have been Executive Board representative Seat 520, which represents DOT Regions 4 (Rochester) and 6 (Hornell) since March of 2023. I was also recently elected to steward of my local division, Division 175.

Why did you choose to run for a leadership position?

Anne: To get more involved in the union and to understand what the union does for me and my members.

Chris: I wanted to represent my fellow coworkers at DOT. I wanted to make sure their voices are heard at Executive Board. As for my division, I wanted my coworkers in Hornell to see the value and benefits that PEF can give them, and what working together can do to help everyone.

Please comment on the value of public employees.

Anne: The state would not run without its public employees; we are the oil to the machine and the glue that keeps it together.

Chris: Public employees are essential for our society to function. We do many things that the general public take for granted. I take pride in knowing that my work can impact thousands of people by keeping them safe on the highway, helping them get to where they need to go. We serve the general public because we know what we do is essential for everyone. It is not just to benefit stockholders or put extra money into certain pockets. It's about maintaining our state and way of life.

If you would like to suggest someone for a future Union Leader Spotlight, please email communicator@pef.org.



PEF member highlights his union values during U.S. presidential race

By **NAJEE WALKER**

January 23 was Primary Day in New Hampshire, and believe it or not, a PEF member was on the ballot. Raymond Moroz, a chief computer operator at the Office of the State Comptroller and a PEF Executive Board member, is on the Democratic ballot in the state of New Hampshire.

"I am running for U.S. president to protect workers and the working class," said Moroz during the New Hampshire Institute of Politics Lesser-Known Candidates Forum, held at Saint Anselm College in December 2023. "If elected I would help protect the middle class by increasing unions and union membership."

Unions have always been a part of Moroz's life. His first job out of high school was at a Brooklyn-based refinery whose staff consisted of unionized staff. His salary, he recalls, was at least three times the rate of the private sector in 1979. With overtime, he said, he made somewhere around \$30 an hour. After taking several different non-union jobs, he ended up taking the New York State exam for a Computer Operator and getting hired at the Comptroller's Office in 1986, where he's been ever since.

"The union benefits made it a no-brainer," Moroz said. "I was doing the same job in private sector IT, but thanks to the union I was making two times or three times more money."

Moroz has been a PEF member since 1999 and serves on the Executive Board, attends Convention as a delegate and is a steward.

The forum where Moroz appeared has been a tradition in New Hampshire since 1972. New Hampshire allows candidates to get their name on the presidential primary ballot for only \$1,000, which is a much lower entry cost than other states. As a result, there are 45 people on the ballot in New Hampshire.

This is not his first run in New Hampshire's primary. He found out about New Hampshire's presidential primary policy while reading an

article in The New York Times. He paid the fee and was a candidate in 2016 and 2020 as well.

At the "Lesser-Known Candidates Forum," Moroz joined 13 other democratic primary candidates on stage at Saint Anselm College not only to share his campaign platform, but to champion the values of his union, unionism, and the working class. He wore a "Union Strong!" sweatshirt to the event.

"I would increase the powers of the National Labor Relations Board to fine big corporations like Amazon, Walmart and Tesla, who are fighting unions tooth and nail," he said. "I would like to thank President Biden for being the first sitting president to walk the picket line in the UAW strike. This has helped the labor movement tremendously in a positive way."

Moroz has always run on the democratic line because to him, there is no choice.

"It's real basic," Moroz said. "The democratic party platform for decades has always been promoting unions, unionism, and worker protection."

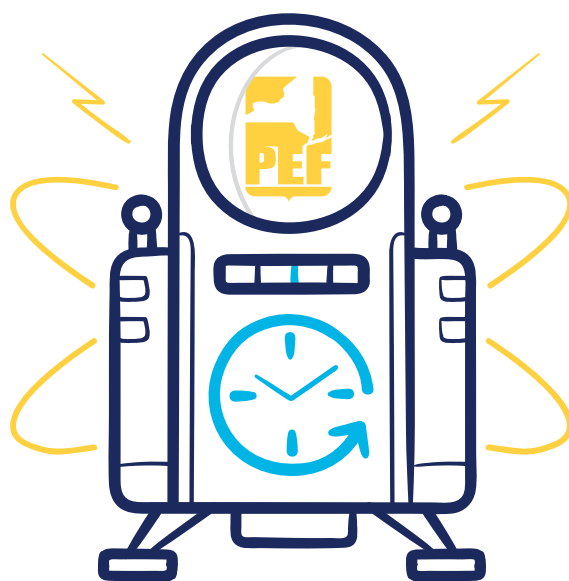
Moroz believes that labor unions have a hard time politically and get lost or left behind as other issues take up space. The \$1,000 investment to run as what he calls an "activist" candidate, is worth it if it helps elevate unions and get people talking.

Moroz said that he hopes other PEF members, unions, and leaders follow his example. Even if it means they will not be president, Moroz believes that getting involved this way furthers the cause.

"I hope that people actually get involved in their union," he said. "If you can get involved in union principles, and you try to run for office, try to lift the union when you do."



Click the play button to watch the Lesser Known Candidate Forum as televised on C-SPAN. Moroz speaks at about 8:45.



PEF Blast from the Past: Chalking up some wins against toxic management

Retaliation comes in many forms.

In 1995 at the Department of State (DOS) in Albany, an employee lunchroom/breakroom was converted to “union” private offices and two leaders were relocated to the spaces. Those leaders and PEF didn’t take kindly to the situation.

According to then PEF Field Representative Jim Hair, the union broke new ground in the lunchroom improper practice charge case. Part of PEF’s argument involved the unprecedented assertion that management had retaliated against two active PEF leaders by creating the appearance of preferential treatment.

“Hair contended that by singling the two union leaders out for an apparent favor, at the expense of a popular benefit, department managers sought to foster resentment among the pair’s coworkers,” the story in the February 1995 issue of The Communicator stated. The settlement in the case called for removal of a dividing wall built during the conversion and restoration of the lunchroom.

The story also chronicled the cases of a leader downstate who said he faced retaliation in the form of lower performance evaluations for filing grievances and a council leader who was demoted due to his union activism.

[Check out the original story here.](#)

Nearly 30 years later, PEF is once again at the forefront of the fight against retaliation and toxic workplaces – most recently with the launch of a large-scale campaign to shine a light on what’s happening in New York state agencies and to push for legislation to address workplace bullying and abusive conduct through education and training. PEF will continue to push for passage of the legislation in 2024 – it got through the Assembly last year, but stalled in the Senate — and is calling for the state to create uniform standards to define bullying and abusive conduct in the workplace.

View “Toxic Tales” videos from fellow members about the toxicity of their workplaces and learn more about the campaign [here](#). If you have a toxic tale to share, please get in touch with us at Communicator@pef.org. We will work with you to share your story in the most sensitive way and safeguard your identity if necessary.



PEF to DOS: Let's end retaliation

PEF leaders at the state Department of State (DOS) demonstrated recently they will not stand for management's union-busting tactics — even when it means giving up what appears to be preferential treatment.

The union leaders said they hope the transition to new management through state government will open the door to a more professional spirit of mutual respect and common purpose for labor-management relations at the Department of State.

"Unfortunately, we've seen an atmosphere of retaliation for federally protected union activity," said Claire Pospisil, who represents PEF members at DOS on the union's Executive Board.

In late December and early January the union and agency resolved two charges of improper labor practices which PEF had filed.

In one case, PEF claimed the arbitrary conversion of an employee lunchroom/breakroom in Albany to private "union" offices constituted the unilateral removal of an employee benefit without prior negotiation with the union.

The injury was compounded because two PEF leaders at DOS were ordered to relocate to the private offices, which were "leaky" by comparison to the working conditions of most of their coworkers.

In another case, downstate, a PEF leader and another member (who had pursued grievances against the agency) claimed retribution was the reason for lower performance evaluations.

These cases, in which PEF was represented by field representatives Jim Hair and Norman Darzig, were resolved favorably to the union and its members.

In yet a third case, which has yet to be heard, the PEF council leader at DOS downstate claims union activism was the real reason for his demotion.

Altogether, the union has filed a half dozen IPs at DOS since mid-1993.

This can't be love

In the Albany case, the settlement called for removal of a dividing wall, built during the conversion of the employee lunchroom to offices and the lunchroom restored.

PEF had argued the room, which

many employees used at lunch and on breaks, constituted an employee benefit and, therefore, its removal in July 1994 should have been subject to negotiation.

According to Hair, the union broke new ground in the lunchroom IP. Part of PEF's argument, he said, involved the unprecedented assertion that management had retaliated against two active PEF leaders by creating the appearance of preferential treatment.

Hair contended that by singling the two union leaders out for an apparent favor, at the expense of a popular benefit, department managers sought to foster resentment among the pair's coworkers.

The targets of the tactic were Pospisil and PEF Division 295



SELISTE

Secretary Sarah Williams. The two union advocates, were moved involuntarily into the spacious offices carved from the employee lunchroom. DOS claimed it

converted the lunchroom to offices because work space was short at the 162 Washington Ave. building.

But managers moved Pospisil and Williams in to the Washington Ave. site from the agency's Office of Public Affairs and information at 41 State St., where crowding is not a problem.

The move severed Pospisil and Williams from their work unit.

As part of the settlement, Pospisil and Williams were moved to smaller offices (designated by managers) in space that had previously been a conference room on another floor of the Washington Ave. building.

Citing their contractual right to deploy the workforce, DOS managers refuse to allow the two professionals to return to the Office of Public Affairs.

Hard to justify

According to Pospisil, removing her and Williams from the Office of Public Affairs, made no sense from a practical standpoint.

"It really was counter-productive to move us and wasteful to erect that wall and then have to tear it down," Pospisil said.

Dave Buerle, a PEF member who works in coastal management for DOS, said the absence of the 7th floor room, which was reserved for non-smokers, had left him with no place to eat on days when his schedule forced him to take his

lunch break after 2 p.m.

The room the department had provided as a substitute non-smoking lunch area was available only from noon to 2 p.m.

"I'm glad to see the lunchroom is back the way it was," Buerle said.

More retaliation

In early January, Darzig won the reinstatement of 1992-93 performance ratings from "effective" to "highly effective" for members Bruno Seliste and PEF Division 346 Treasurer George Custance.

According to the two license-investigation supervisors, who work out of DOS's Manhattan office, the rating downgrade was one of a number of retaliatory actions directed their way after they filed a grievance in early 1993 to protest an arbitrary personnel move.

According to Division 346 Council Leader Les Wrublewski, the initial 1993 grievance started an adversarial cycle of management retaliation.

The PEF leaders said managers rebuffed the union's efforts to resolve those problems through informal discussions.

"It seemed for every union grievance, there was another management action," said Wrublewski, who has his own IP pending against the department for moves made against him over the last year and a half.

"It was as if management was saying, 'if you want to do this, this is what we're going to do to you now to make life unbearable.'"

Custance said the administrative law judge handling the IP conference felt it was important the agreement include a statement prohibiting DOS from reducing performance ratings in retaliation for union activities in the future.

Not a productive atmosphere

Custance said fear of management retaliation has taken its toll on department morale in the office.

"It creates a very poor working environment," he said. "You're always under pressure. You're trying to do your job, but you're always wondering about what they're going to do to you next."

According to Pospisil, the final 18

months of Cuomo-administration control of DOS was characterized by a total of six IP filings statewide, three times as many as in previous years.

"It was basically a breakdown," she said. "We've had to take things to the Public Employment Relations Board to resolve them."

The atmosphere of retaliation has had a chilling effect on the union.

Pospisil said, making members wary of taking on leadership posts out of fear of retaliation.

Opportunity for change

Many in the department see hopeful things may improve under the Pataki administration, and PEF leaders have written to the new secretary of state, Alexander Treadwell, welcoming him to the agency.

Pospisil has requested a meeting with Treadwell to discuss department problems and offer suggestions for improvement.

Noting his predecessors as council leader faced similar difficulties, Wrublewski said the most problematic aspect of the agency's management style has been its unwillingness to discuss differences of opinion.

"We don't expect people to agree with us 100 percent of the time, but we hope they at least will listen to us and not retaliate," Wrublewski said. "Hopefully, with the change of administration, there will be a change of policy toward the employees."

Seliste echoed Wrublewski, and said he's hopeful Secretary of State Treadwell and his staff will tap the first-hand experience of PEF professionals while working to improve the way the department does business.

"It is very important the new administration speak directly with the lower-level supervisors and not get their information solely from middle management," Seliste said.

Seliste said he's heartened by Pataki's pledge to break apart bureaucratic management "empires" in an effort to cut costs and improve operations.

DOS would be a good place to begin, Seliste said, adding that a great many of the department's civil servants would be more than happy to help him do it.



CUSTANCE



WRUBLEWSKI

law judge handling the IP conference felt it was important the agreement include a statement prohibiting DOS from reducing performance ratings in retaliation for union activities in the future.



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](#).

www.pef.org/careers-at-pef

Get ready to support budget campaigns

Happy 2024 to all,

It's the time of year when New York State prepares for the yearly budget. As our union's Legislative Office and the Statewide Political Action Committee (SWPAC) review the governor's budget we prioritize the top six issues which affect members and retirees the most.

While these will be our budget priorities, please know that PEF Retirees will join PEF's efforts to advocate in support of or opposition to the other items detailed in the budget analysis.

SWPAC's goal is simply to highlight the major issues and maximize the efforts of our members on our most important issues:

1. Fix Tier 6
2. Support SUNY Downstate
3. Stop Closing State Prisons and Make Them Safer
4. Don't Hurt Our Retirees on Medicare by Eliminating the State's Reimbursement of the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA)
5. Oppose New York's Entry into the Interstate Nursing Compact
6. Support A Skilled Nursing Benefit for Our Retirees

We are all aware that what happens in Albany and Washington has an effect on our lives. Shortly, all dues paying retirees will receive a mailing from the Retirees Office with information on the budget fight-back issues. Every year during NYS Budget notifications we send out a mailing encouraging people to educate themselves and take action. If we are to be successful in advocating for retirees, we need all hands on deck. You may love or hate politics but they it's an integral part of our lives. It's better to do what we can to keep and improve our situation as retirees.

This will be a pivotal and important year with each of us having an obligation to participate! We must engage, commit, and organize our efforts to accomplish our goals. "The purpose for organizing is to protect our hard-earned benefits!" Our ability to provide retirees the quality of living they deserve depends directly on the volume of involvement of our membership! That means each and every one of us advocating for ourselves.

When we identify critical issues on both the federal and state levels, we need everyone to step up and take action. We will be asking you to reach out to your elected representatives and tell them to support our bills and oppose budget proposals that hurt our members.

I'm including a proposed bill below which should absolutely be supported because this is an issue many of you have inquired about! Assemblyman Jones who sponsored the bill is a retired state employee from Region 7.



BILL NUMBER: A8602

SPONSOR: Jones

TITLE OF BILL:

An act to amend the civil service law, in relation to requiring health benefits for state and retired state employees to have the option to only cover the employee or retiree and their spouse or domestic partner

PURPOSE:

The proposed legislation would require health benefits for state and retired state employees have the option to only cover the employee or retiree and their spouse or domestic partner.

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS:

Section 164 of the civil service law is amended by adding a new subdivision 3 to read as follows: Each employee shall be entitled to choose between coverage for themselves, coverage for themselves and their spouse or domestic partner, or coverage for themselves, their spouse or domestic partner, and 6 of their dependents.

JUSTIFICATION:

This bill is needed due to a lack of flexibility in the current plan available to state and retired state employees. Each year, insurance premiums increase while retiree pensions remain subject to annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA). This COLA increase is often insufficient to offset the costs of increased premiums, especially for married couples without dependents who must enroll in the family plan. By allowing for the distinction between a partner and family plan, these two groups particularly married couples who currently pay family plan rates) can enjoy lower rates and decreased financial stress.



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.

Matthew Hoffman is a worker's compensation law judge at the MYS Worker's Compensation Board in Buffalo.

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.



January 24, 2024

PEF members at Division 351 (Attorney General’s Office) met with President Wayne Spence, VP Darlene Williams and PEF staff to hear about the union’s latest wins and priorities and ask questions about the year ahead.



January 12, 2024

Another Fund Our Future win! Gov. Hochul announced a \$50 million investment in mental health care after her State of the State address, which union leaders and staff attended, and which contained many of the proposals PEF has long advocated for as part of our Fund Our Future campaign.





January 12, 2024

Gov. Hochul delivers her State of the State address. PEF leaders and staff attended with key players and advancing union priorities -- from fighting for improvements to Tier 6 of the pension plan to campaigning to end abusive conduct in state workplaces.



January 17, 2024

About 85 PEF members from Division 189 (OPWDD) attended a Utica Comets hockey game against the Ottawa Senators

