

VOL. 42

The COMMUNICATOR

NO. 2

MARCH 2024

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SUNY Downstate
Hospital shows
community strength

Tier 6 rally
highlights state
workers' fervor to fix
pension plang

PEF contract money
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Higher Ed
Differential deadline
looms; don't wait,
get your proof and
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DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY



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THE COMMUNICATOR

Volume 42 No.2

March 2024 (0745-6514)

The Official Publication of the New York State Public Employees Federation, AFL-CIO
1168-70 Troy-Schenectady Rd., Latham, NY 12110-1006

The Communicator is published monthly, except for January and August, for members of the New York State Public Employees Federation.

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**Metro NY Labor
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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



PEF solidarity on display in the community and the Capitol

The first quarter of each year is always a busy time for this union. The State Legislature is in session, soliciting feedback from PEF and other stakeholders as they formalize the budget. The halls of the Capitol in Albany echo with advocates pushing their priority issues at rallies and press conferences. PEF has been an active participant at many of those, including calls to save SUNY Downstate and Fix Tier 6 of the pension plan.

In this issue, we have [coverage of a major rally held outside SUNY Downstate on Feb. 29](#), featuring multiple unions, nearly a dozen concerned lawmakers, Rev. Al Sharpton and more than 1,200 Downstate workers, union members and community activists – all speaking with one voice to say: “Brooklyn Needs Downstate!” This is a fight PEF has waged before, in 2012, when former Governor Cuomo wanted to privatize this critical healthcare hub in Central Brooklyn. After more than a decade of disinvestment and neglect, we’re fighting again to make sure SUNY Downstate stays open and can continue to deliver quality services to a community that deserves it. PEF has created a mobile billboard to travel around the Capitol and State agencies in Albany, and [we invited clergy leaders from Brooklyn up to Albany on March 4-5](#) to meet with legislators and share stories about how vital Downstate is to their congregations. All these actions have raised community awareness about the issue and I’m hopeful that the SUNY chancellor’s misguided plan to transition services from Downstate to Kings County Hospital will not be part of this year’s budget.

On another front, PEF is very involved in the multi-union campaign to “Fix Tier 6” of the State pension plan. [Secretary Treasurer Joe Donahue took part in a rally this week](#) at the Capitol that filled two levels of the Million Dollar Staircase and attracted nearly a dozen supporting lawmakers. We successfully lowered the number of required years of service for vesting in Tier 6 from 10 to 5 in 2022 and I believe there is momentum this year to bring more changes to the Tier so that New York can attract and retain workers to fill the rampant staffing shortages across agencies.

The State’s budget is due April 1, so if you have not yet sent letters to your local lawmakers about PEF’s priorities, [please take a minute to do so](#). Elected officials really pay attention when their constituents make their voices heard.

There are plenty more stories worth reading in this issue of The Communicator – from [contract money paying out this Spring](#) to features about inspiring members at the [Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance](#) and the [NYS Fire Protection Service](#) — and so I will let you get reading. Thank you, as always, for your public service and your PEF pride.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President



PEF President Wayne Spence addresses the Brooklyn Needs Downstate rally on Feb. 29, 2024.

Rally for SUNY Downstate Hospital shows community strength

By **NAJEE WALKER**

When SUNY Chancellor John King started making calls in January about a plan to “transform” SUNY Downstate, unions like PEF and United University Professionals (UUP) were quick to mobilize. Their message? Brooklyn Needs Downstate!

At a rally on February 29, 2024, a crowd of about 1,200 hospital workers, community members and union activists gathered on Clarkson Avenue, outside the entrance to Downstate Medical Center in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, demanding that SUNY and Governor Hochul reconsider the plan.

“Brooklyn is rising, and we will not be stopped by a chancellor, not by a governor. This hospital will survive, and it will because it is the people’s hospital,” said UUP President Fred Kowal. “We stand together, because we will not let it close. Not today, not tomorrow. Never.”

Several politicians, including State Senator Zellnor Myrie, whose district includes Downstate, Assemblymember Monique Chandler-Waterman and Assemblymember Latrice Walker, all spoke against the plan, which would move 150 beds across the street to Kings County Hospital and farm out a variety of other specialty services offered by Downstate.

“We will not yield, we will not stop,” said Senator Myrie. “We are at this rally today, but if we have to hold 10 more rallies, we will hold 10 more rallies.”

Community members, clergy members and civil rights activist Reverend Al Sharpton joined the rally as well, sharing messages on behalf of the surrounding community and patients who depend

on services at Downstate, which is the fourth largest employer in Brooklyn and home to the borough’s only kidney transplant center.

“We find money in the federal government to take care of people all over the world, and we should,” said Reverend Sharpton. “So now, find the money to take care of people in Central Brooklyn!”

PEF President Wayne Spence, NYSUT President Melinda Person, NYSNA President Nancy Hagans and AFT President Randi Weingarten all delivered unified messages to the crowd. President Spence recalled the history of Downstate’s excellence and innovation to illustrate its influence not only on Brooklyn and New York, but the world.

“The MRI was invented right here at Downstate,” Spence said. “This is who we are! We are not fly-by-night, we are not small! We are, intellectually, a powerful organization! We have proven who we are!”

President Spence also called on the crowd and the governor to remember all the work that the healthcare heroes at SUNY Downstate performed when they were designated a COVID-only hospital in March 2020.

“If Andrew Cuomo would have had his way in 2012, we would not have been here because we would have been closed,” Spence said. “We stood up to the challenge during COVID and we saved lives. We should not have to justify our existence! We should not be here having this conversation!”

President Spence said it is time that SUNY and the governor step away from their plans and focus on the community that needs SUNY Downstate.



The claims made by Spence and other union leaders are supported by a survey of Brooklyn residents. The survey, conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), polled more than 600 residents in Central Brooklyn last month. Respondents overwhelmingly said they and/or their families received good or excellent care at Downstate (79%). Additionally, the majority of respondents felt that relocating the services from Downstate to

Kings County Hospital will increase wait times for emergency rooms and surgeries and have a negative impact on jobs and the local economy.

The full survey is available, [here](#).

PEF gathers elected leaders, NYC clergy for discussion about SUNY Downstate. Read the story online [here](#).



BROOKLYN
NEEDS DOWNSTATE





PEF Secretary Treasurer Joe Donahue (center, in jacket) addresses a Tier 6 rally on a landing of the Million Dollar Staircase inside the New York State Capitol on March 5, 2024.

Tier 6 rally highlights state workers' fervor to fix pension plan

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Since April 2012, all employees hired by New York State have been part of what's called "Tier 6" of the pension plan. PEF knew it was a bad idea by Gov. Cuomo then, and more than a decade later, the union continues to fight for improvements.

In 2022, PEF and other unions successfully advocated to change the vesting period for Tier 6 members from 10 years to five years. But more change is needed, and many Tier 6 members are making sure their voices are heard loud and clear.

Members from PEF, NYSUT, other unions and legislators took to the steps of the Million Dollar Staircase inside the Capitol Building in Albany on March 5, 2024, to rally alongside one another. The message was clear, Tier 6 is not working, it is not retaining workers and it makes it harder for the state to attract more workers.

PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue shared the union's message of solidarity with the crowd, focusing on the state's inability to retain workers, but more importantly keep up with the competition from the private sector. Donahue said one of the reasons the governor has not been able to fill the tens of thousands of vacancies across

FIX TIER 6!

the State is because skilled professionals are attracted to the better benefits and retirement plans offered by the private sector.



"Back when I started with my agency (Department of Taxation), we had a pension, decent benefits, and decent wages—the private sector now controls that. And we're not only unable to recruit, we're unable to retain," Donahue said. "When people say I'm a Tier 4 person, Tier 6 doesn't affect me — well, sure it does! It affects all of us."

Donahue added that he's fighting to improve Tier 6 not only for PEF members, but also for his son, who is a fourth-grade teacher currently in Tier 6.

"We need to fix Tier 6 so that we can maintain the amazing public servants that we have right now," said NYSUT President Melinda Person.

Mario Cilento, president of the New York State AFL-CIO, pledged support from the entire statewide labor movement.

"We are asking that both houses of the legislature and the governor work with us now to address Tier 6 in this budget!" he said.

Legislators like Senator Robert Jackson, Jessica Ramos, John Mannion and Samra Brouk also affirmed their support in the continued efforts to fix Tier 6.

"You're here because the leadership of your unions said this was necessary, to come here and stand up for what belongs to you!" said Senator Jackson.

PEF has an ongoing letter writing campaign about Tier 6 targeting state lawmakers. If you haven't signed it – or any of the other letters supporting PEF's budget priorities – please do so, [here](#).

TIER 6

3-6%

Tier 6 members pay 3-6% of their salaries into the pension system their entire career. As they make more money, their mandatory contributions increase.

TIER 4

3%

Tier 4 member contributions are capped at 3 percent and end after 10 years.

TIER 6

age 63

Tier 6 members must work to age 63, up to 40 years of service, or face heavy penalties when accessing their pension funds.

TIER 4

age 55

Tier 4 members can retire at 55 with 30 years of service.



Tier 6 rally at
the Capitol



Members of the Brooklyn clergy pose for a photograph with PEF leaders and staff at the Desmond Hotel on March 5, 2024, prior to their meeting with the governor's office.

PEF gathers elected leaders, NYC clergy for discussion about SUNY Downstate

Following the multi-union rally at SUNY Downstate on Feb. 29, PEF invited faith leaders from Brooklyn and the surrounding area to Albany on March 4 and 5 to talk with legislators and other officials about the importance of saving the state-run hospital in Brooklyn.

Nearly a dozen clergy members participated, sharing the negative responses they've heard from their congregations about the proposal and urging lawmakers to keep the pressure on SUNY Central and the governor's office to rethink the plan. The faith leaders in attendance were: Rev. Dr. Joseph Chukwu (Helping Hands Ministry), Rev. Dr. Kirkpatrick Cohall (Lenox Road Baptist Church), Bishop Orlando Findlayter (New Hope Christian Fellowship), Rev. Dr. Charles Galbreath Alliance Tabernacle), Fayth Henderson (Church of God of East Flatbush), Pastor Edward Hinds (Rugby Deliverance Tabernacle), Pastor James Richmond (Seventh Day Adventist Church), Rev. Dr. Winston Fyne (Beulah Church of the Nazarene), and Rev. Craig Wright (People's Institutional AME Church).

The following concerned legislators attended the roundtable discussion: State Senators Jabari Brisport, Iwen Chu, Robert Jackson, Zellnor Myrie, Kevin Parker, and Gustavo Rivera, as well as Assemblymembers Rodneyse Bichotte, Brian Cunningham, Chantel Jackson, Phara Souffrant Forrest, Latrice Walker, and Helene Weinstein.

On March 5, the clergy members and PEF staff met with representatives from Gov. Hochul's office. PEF President Wayne Spence sent the following to the clergy members who participated:

"Thank you to everyone who participated in PEF's roundtable on March 4 bringing together faith leaders and elected State officials to talk about the importance of SUNY Downstate. Those conversations helped us to have an informed conversation with Governor Hochul's chief of staff and I think we made some real progress. We had a productive two days, but this fight is not over.



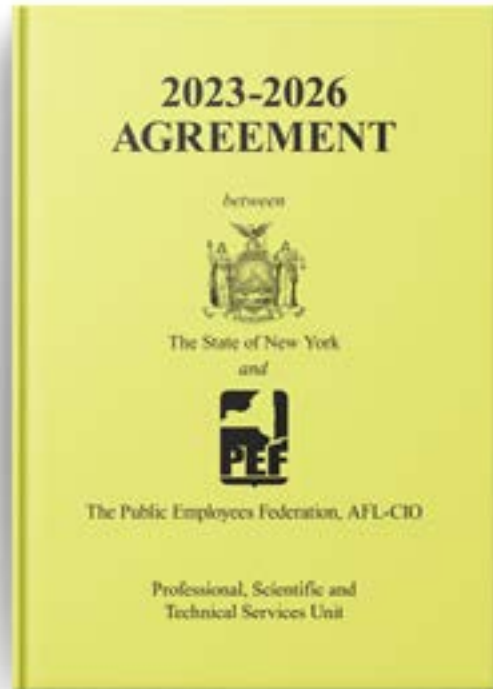
State Senator Zellnor Myrie, top, and Assemblymember Brian Cunningham, whose legislative districts include SUNY Downstate, were among the attendees of the PEF roundtable.

We will continue to keep the pressure on SUNY Central and those who have devalued and disrespected Downstate for far too long. This powerful coalition is determined to change that and make sure everyone in New York knows: Brooklyn Needs Downstate! We will continue to work to expand our coalition to educate the community and save Downstate. I hope you would heed any call to action that may come from us to continue the fight."

PEF contract money to be paid this Spring

Members have started reaching out asking, “Where’s the money?” We’re happy to share that members will see quite a few extra bumps in their paychecks in the next few months negotiated as part of the 2023-2026 PS&T Contract.

- 1. \$400 Dental Stipend:** During contract negotiations last year, PEF convinced the state to enter into an agreement that will cost more than \$20 million a year until they replace EmblemHealth as the NYSHIP dental services provider. That translates to \$400 per PEF member in the PS&T unit annually. The first payment is for 2023 and will go to members who were enrolled in the NYSHIP Dental Plan as of July 28, 2023. Members on the Administration Payroll will see the stipend in their March 13 paycheck and Institution Payroll on March 21. *Note: The \$400 stipend for 2024 will be paid later this year to members who were enrolled in the dental plan as of April 1, 2024.*
- 2. \$600 Higher Education Differential:** This is a first-of-its-kind benefit the union negotiated to recognize the professional nature of the jobs PEF members perform. To receive it, members must hold a qualifying degree (Associate’s or higher) or a professional license issued by the State Education Department. The degree or license does not have to be a job requirement or related to the position’s duties. The payment is not automatic, members must submit proof. Your agency’s human resource office should provide details on how to submit such proof, but we estimate that the vast majority of PEF members will qualify. The Higher Ed Differential will be paid for the second two years of the contract, \$600 each year. Proof is due to agencies by March 29. Members should submit documentation as soon as possible. The first \$600 payments are expected to be made April 24 or May 2.
- 3. 2024 Raise:** All PS&T members will receive a 3% increase to their base salary, effective April 2, 2024.
- 4. Performance Awards:** Those eligible will likely see these payments in April 2024. The exact pay date has not yet been announced. Performance awards for 2024 are either \$1,500, \$3,000 or \$4,500 depending on whether the employee is at 5, 10 or 15 years at top of grade. In April 2025, changes will go into effect basing performance awards on total years of continuous state service, rather than years at top of grade. After that date, years of service in other units, like CSEA, will be counted.



- 5. Location Pay:** The contract increases the Downstate location pay adjustment to \$3,400 effective April 1, 2024 (up from \$3,087 in April 2023) and the Mid-Hudson location pay adjustment to \$1,650 (up from \$1,543). Additional increases to \$4,000 for Downstate and \$2,000 for Mid-Hudson will occur in April 2025.
- 6. Hazardous Duty Pay:** For titles receiving hazardous duty pay, the pay rate increases to \$1 per hour effective April 2, 2024, up from 90 cents per hour in April 2023.



\$600

Higher Ed Differential deadline looms; don't wait, get your proof and submit now!

By **KATE STICKLES**

During a Telephone Town Hall on February 29, PEF leaders and staff explained the ins and outs of the first-of-its-kind Higher Educational Differential negotiated in the 2023-2026 PS&T Contract and urged members to act now if they qualify.

Members have until March 29 to submit proof they hold an associate's or higher degree, or a professional license issued by the State Education Department and payments are expected to come April 24 (Administration Payroll) or May 2 (Institution Payroll). That proof can come in several forms, the degree or license does not need to be related to the member's State job, and the proof can be submitted in a variety of ways.

"In early February, agencies and facilities started putting out instructions on how to submit proof," said Director of Contract Administration Deb Greenberg said. "It's not uniform. Some agencies have an email box, some have a form to fill out. We've been on the phone with OER (the Office of Employee Relations) and the Governor's Office to make sure agencies are doing this properly."

Proof can be copies of a diploma, pictures of a diploma, or final transcripts that reflect the degree conferred. If members can't find their diploma, they can ask to see their personnel file in human resources. PEF advises photographing the proof and submitting it via the agency's process. In some agencies, members can also ask the agency to look in their background check file. Members who don't have a copy of their college credentials can also order a transcript from their college/university showing the degree conferred. Members with more than one kind of proof need only submit one.

Some unique cases

Greenberg said the college does not need to be accredited for members to use the conferred degree. This is important for those with degrees earned outside of the U.S.

"We've been working out hiccups at agency level, at the statewide level with OER, with the Governor's Office," Greenberg said. "We don't want anybody, particularly people with degrees from foreign educational institutions, not to submit because they heard

something about the college or university had to be accredited; as that is simply not true."

In rare occasions, members may be unable to find their diploma and unable to request a transcript, such as when a college has closed.

"It's very unusual, but we made arrangements for an attestation form," Greenberg said. Members would need to be specific and outline all the steps they took to try and obtain the necessary proof.

The higher ed differential will be counted toward overall compensation when calculating overtime. Originally, the state was not going to do so. PEF was prepared to file a class-action grievance on the issue, but after productive conversations, the state changed course before it was needed.

PEF has your back

Once members get confirmation their submission was received, they should retain it.

"You get confirmation, you save it," President Spence said. "If they say they didn't receive it, then we will ask you for the confirmation so we can fight for you. We are hoping these things won't happen."

Greenberg urged members to contact PEF if they face any obstacles.

"We can only advocate when we know there is a problem," she said. "We need to know what's going on at the ground level, so if something happens, contact your field rep. If your proof is rejected, contact your field rep. If you think there is obstruction from your agency, contact your field rep."

President Spence said he is going through the process now himself.

"Don't walk away from this \$600," he said. "I graduated in 1989 and I had to go back and find my degree."

[Click to listen to the PEF Telephone Town Hall for All Members, February 29, 2024](#)

PEF Townhall focuses on contract and budget updates

By **NAJEE WALKER**

As the budget season ramps up, PEF is working hard to make sure that members of the union and state workers are kept high on the list of things for legislators and the governor to focus on. During the second telephone Town Hall of the year on Feb. 15, 2024, PEF President Wayne Spence offered members a chance to know exactly what those priorities are and how they can get involved.

However, before digging into the details on the budget, President Spence delivered some good news to PEF members: The \$400 dental stipend and \$600 higher education differentials are on the way.

For the higher education differential, eligible employees must be on the payroll as of April 1, 2024. Staff must hold an associate's degree or higher from a college or university or a professional license from the New York State Education Department (SED). Some agencies may use documentation they already have, but many are requiring members to submit their proof. PEF advises that if agencies ask for proof to make sure to provide it before the deadline of March 29.

"Proof can be a copy," said Director of Contract Administration Debra Greenberg. "It does not have to be an original. A copy of your current license, a copy of your degree, a copy of a college transcript showing the degree, or even a photo of it hanging on a wall."

Greenberg also said that a copy of degrees may be in agency personnel folders. Both President Spence and Greenberg advised that members check their personnel folders. In the unusual situation where members cannot obtain a copy of their diploma or degree, Greenberg recommends reaching out to Human Resources and to a PEF field representative.

"Contact your HR department to request an alternative method of submission. If there is any trouble with that, contact your field representative," Greenberg said. "We did make arrangements to deal with unusual situations like that."

The contract does not define accreditation or exclude foreign degrees. If a member has their proof denied for any of those reasons, Greenberg again recommends contacting a field representative so PEF can work on the issue as soon as possible.

Members can expect these first payments to be made on April 24 for those on the administrative payroll, and May 2 for those on the institutional payroll.

The dental stipend, which is included in the contract while the state works through a request for proposal (RFP) for a new dental provider, should be hitting PEF members' paychecks by March 13 for those on the administrative payroll, and March 21 for those on the institutional payroll. PEF anticipates an update this spring on the potential for a new dental provider.



PEF President Wayne Spence, Vice President Randi DiAntonio, Research Associate Jean-Rene Shekerjian, Vice President Darlene Williams, Political Director Leah Gonzalez, Information Systems Director Joe Cocci, Executive Director Todd Kerner, Legislative Director Patrick Lyons and Contract Administration Direct Debra Greenberg seated around the table deliver critical information to members during Feb. 15 town hall

"We expect the state to be making an announcement this spring regarding the final results of the RFP," Greenberg said. "After the announcement is made, there's usually an implementation period of about six months."

Members will also receive their contractually negotiated 3% salary increase in April, as well as performance awards and advances for those eligible.

PEF Budget Priorities

President Spence said that while he knows Governor Hochul has a lot of high-profile proposals to deal with the migrant crisis, affordable housing and many other issues in New York, his priority is still to PEF members.

"Governor Hochul stated that she was aware that every New York State worker was underpaid and she was committed to changing that," President Spence said. "We want to make sure that that does not get lost."

As PEF continues to advocate for across-the-board salary upgrades for all titles, President Spence offered the membership a look behind the curtain to help understand how the New York State Department of Civil Service (DCS) approaches the process and why it is taking so long.

Jean-Rene Shekerjian, a research associate in PEF's Civil Service Enforcement and Research Department, and President Spence both shared that although DCS has been preparing to conduct a pay equity study for some time now, they only just sent out their request for proposals (RFP) this February. And the new study is a follow up to the pay equity study conducted from 2019 to 2022. It will not look at the competitiveness of State salaries.

Shekerjian added that the first pay equity study included a survey of more than 1,000 State job titles and asked survey respondents hundreds of questions to try to determine whether their job title was paid fairly in comparison to other State job titles.

"They had about 9,000 respondents, 200 questions," Shekerjian said. "They had to turn that into numbers, then pump that through their statistical instrument to yield results."

While the current RFP only relates to internal studies and information, Shekerjian shared that in the spring, DCS will also send out another RFP to compare how competitive the state is compared to the private sector.

PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio also offered a quick update on the union's efforts to upgrade the salaries of social workers. In September 2023, the Office of Mental Health (OMH) submitted a proposal to DCS to upgrade social workers who work for the agency.

"This was not an easy lift," DiAntonio said. "This was months and months of advocacy, arguing, putting pressure on them, writing letters, calling legislators and doing all sorts of things."

DiAntonio offered that any members of PEF who believe they are underpaid should focus on putting pressure on their employers. Local members can start by advocating at the ground level with PEF's support.

"Members should not wait for a wage study to start advocating," DiAntonio said. "We can work with members in individual titles, we can work with their leaders, as well as PEF Field Services and Civil Service staff, to highlight specific titles, to identify pay differences, to have it put on your labor management agenda and to push your employers to prioritize. This is never an easy lift, but we know it's possible."

As for the state budget under negotiation, PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons laid out the union's priorities and how members can help advance them. PEF has many priorities and challenges ahead, including putting a stop to the fast-tracking of prison closures on a 90-day expedited timeline, and preventing the State from closing SUNY Downstate hospital.

However, there are several proposals in the governor's budget that mirror PEF's [Fund Our Future](#) campaign priorities.

"To her credit, she did adopt our proposal to end the lag payroll system for new hires, and end the salary deferral program for new hires," Lyons said. "Under those programs as they exist now, a member coming into state service wouldn't receive a check for 14 weeks."

"Reforming Tiers 5 and 6 of the State pension plan remain the union's top priority," Lyons said. "This is about fairness and it is the most cost-effective way to attract and retain the workers New York needs to deliver services."

There are several other issues that members can read about on PEF's website. Currently, the union is asking all members to send emails about eight PEF budget priorities to their local leaders. ([Click here to send yours.](#))

"You play an important role in this system to try and advocate on behalf of all of our members," Lyons said. "I know not all of these items effect every single one of our titles and our members at all of our agencies, but at some point, they may."

"If we don't act in unison as a union of 50,000 strong, we are losing an opportunity," he said. "We can't wait until we're the last ones waiting for a bad thing to happen to us. We have to work together now."

[Click here or the play button below to listen to the Town Hall.](#)



Here are some general time codes indicating what was discussed and when:

- 00:00 – 08:20:** Update about the 2023-2026 negotiated \$600 Higher Education Differential
- 08:20 – 12:35:** Update on the Dental Stipend and other incoming payments via contract negotiations.
- 12:35 – 22:50:** Update regarding Civil Service Pay Equity Study.
- 22:50 – 30:25:** Progress on Social Worker salary enhancements and hiring.
- 30:25 – 42:45:** Budget concerns and priorities.
- 42:45 – 52:30:** Budget proposals PEF supports.
- 52:30 – 54:15:** Answers to questions submitted by members.
- 54:15 – 56:20:** Details about PEF's letter-writing campaign for budget priorities.
- 56:20 to end:** Closing remarks from President Spence, final call to action.





A crowd of UUP, PEF, SEIU and other union members line the Million Dollar Staircase in protest to the plan to close SUNY Downstate.

PEF, UUP and other unions call out SUNY Downstate closure plans

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF President Wayne Spence joined hundreds of UUP and PEF members, along with leaders from AFT, the New York State AFL-CIO, NYSUT and several legislators at the New York State Capitol on Feb. 6 to call on the state to stop the closure of SUNY Downstate Hospital. The rally is in response to a “Transformation Plan” for the hospital that was made public as part of the budget negotiation process.

The decision came as a surprise, even for many members of the State Legislature.

At the height of the pandemic, SUNY Downstate was designated a “COVID-only” hospital and cared for thousands of patients in 2020 and 2021. Members expressed their disappointment with the decision after they were so loudly hailed as heroes during the pandemic.

“Our community walked past refrigerator trucks full of dead people during COVID. SUNY Downstate was the only COVID hospital and our nurses and doctors got sick,” said New York State Senator Zellnor Myrie. “How dare the state have the temerity to close SUNY Downstate!”

President Spence said that this isn’t the first time unions have had to have this fight. In 2012, then-Governor Cuomo initiated a similar plan to close the hospital citing similar budget concerns. PEF and other unions, alongside many legislators, fought back against the closure of the hospital and won. Now, President Spence says, history is repeating itself.

“Staff at SUNY Downstate worked hard after being designated a COVID-only hospital. But that may not have been possible if we didn’t fight to keep it open in 2012,” Spence said in his remarks. “How many people would’ve died without SUNY Downstate? Thank God, we got it right. So why are we here again to fight for this hospital and this community? Shame!”

SUNY Downstate is the only state-run hospital in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn. It is also a public teaching hospital that treats all patients, especially those who are on Medicaid, are underinsured or uninsured. The hospital trains the highest number of Black and minority healthcare professionals in the country. Additionally, SUNY Downstate provides specialized care that other area hospitals do not — such as Brooklyn’s only kidney transplant program.

President Spence said that he’s received assurances no PEF members will lose their jobs if the plan is carried out, but UUP members could see their staffing cut by as much as 20 percent. In addition to potential job losses, a transitioning of services to other area hospitals would put many patients at risk of having their treatment disrupted or terminated.

Spence joined his fellow union leaders and lawmakers and demanded a “voice at the table” before any final plan is created. Neither the unions that represent staff at the hospital nor members of the community were consulted about the “transition plan,” and there still is nothing in writing outlining exactly what will be done and when.

Spence pledged PEF’s support as the campaign continues to save the healthcare heart of Brooklyn.

“We have stood together to save SUNY Downstate before,” he said. “We will do it again!”



PEF President Wayne Spence takes the podium at the Million Dollar Staircase to call for the state to stop their plan to close SUNY Downstate.





“We have stood together to save
SUNY Downstate before,” he said.
“We will do it again!”

vimeo.com/910975377

vimeo

PEF social workers join in lobbying effort to support their profession

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Low pay, high stress, unsafe conditions, and increasing workloads all make the job of a New York State social worker difficult. Despite those obstacles, social workers continue to perform critical work – helping New Yorkers access critical services and receive the help they need.

That was the message nearly two dozen PEF social workers delivered to State senators and members of the Assembly on Feb. 13 at a Capitol Action Day organized by the New York State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

Together with NASW members, PEF members told legislators there are several things that must be addressed in order for social workers to thrive in New York. It starts with putting pressure on the Department of Civil Service and the Division of Budget to act on a salary reallocation proposal submitted to them last fall by the Office of Mental Health, with significant input from PEF.

“There are a lot of us in this room who have been doing this work for a long time and have not seen our salaries be equal to our work,” PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio said during a meeting with Sen. Robert Jackson. “There have been a lot of studies that have corroborated this, and as you know this is a female-dominated profession.”

As of now, there are more than 200 vacant social worker positions across the State. In addition to prompt consideration of the salary reallocation package, PEF pushed for fixes to Tier 6 of the State pension plan – which currently forces members to contribute more as they earn more for far lower benefits.

“You know I support that, and I am going to do everything I can to make sure it gets done,” said Senator Robert Jackson, who chairs the Senate Civil Service and Pensions Committee.

As part of their lobbying efforts, PEF social workers also called on legislators to support two bills currently working their way through the Senate and Assembly: S.3065/A.8934 and S.8218/A.8375.

The first bill, introduced by Senator Jessica Ramos and Assemblymember Harry Bronson, aims to reduce abusive conduct and bullying in the workplace through training, reporting and remediation. This measure would regulate other harmful workplace conduct in the same manner that sexual harassment is regulated.

The second bill, introduced by Senator Rachel May and Assemblymember Aileen Gunther, expands and improves the provision of loan forgiveness to eligible social workers in New York. PEF believes that this will help close the staffing gap and provide the thousands of New Yorkers living with mental illness the quality care they need.

“I think we can support that,” Senator John Liu told the lobbying social workers during his meeting. “It makes sense to me to support that.”

PEF members also joined NASW members for a lunchtime rally on the steps of the Million Dollar Staircase in the State Capitol. The group delivered a unified message to legislators: The people of New York need Social Workers, and they need them now!





Mahlon Irish accepts plaque from the New York Fire Protection Specialists for his 40 years of service as a New York State Fire Instructor.

PEF member celebrated for 40 years of service

By **NAJEE WALKER**

For many, choosing a career path starts in high school and sticking to that path is often the goal. However, it doesn't always work out that way. PEF member Mahlon Irish, for example, didn't expect to work in fire service for 50 years. And when it comes to being a State Fire Instructor, he certainly didn't expect to go this far.

"I initially wanted to be an architect, when I was in high school," Irish said. "I would never have thought I would have lasted here for 40 years."

Irish was recently recognized by the New York State Fire Protection Specialists for his 40 years of service as a State Fire Instructor. He was presented with a letter of recognition from the State Fire Administrator, a proclamation from the Cortland County Legislature and County Fire Instructors, and many more accolades from local firefighters and Fire Service members.

Irish has been working in fire service since 1974. He worked in the fire station at Homer Fire Department in Homer, N.Y., until he decided to take the test to become a career firefighter in June 1990. Thanks to his years of service, Irish is something of an expert on fire safety and firefighting, which is why, as a 20-year career firefighter, he became a State Fire Instructor.

State Fire Instructors (SFI) work with the Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC), which is a part of the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES). SFIs must have a wealth of experience to work for the state, including five years of service as a fire fighter, and at least two years of experience as an instructor at a company office level.

SFI work is done on a part-time basis, which allows Irish to continue to volunteer as a firefighter while teaching other volunteers and career firefighters.

"There are hundreds, if not thousands of instructors across the state," Irish said. "When I started in Cortland County, there were only two teachers. Now there are eight instructors assigned to the county."

Irish said that he loves teaching and making sure firefighters are doing their job as safely and sustainably as possible. However, he has found fulfillment not only thanks to being an SFI, but also by taking the lead educating on the No. 1 killer of firefighters: Cancer.

In April 2014, Irish was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He had no family history of the disease.

"I most likely got cancer from being a firefighter," Irish said. "Due to the exposure and due to the gear we wear during work."

While dealing with his illness, Irish learned that many other men in the field also develop prostate cancer. However, none of his colleagues wanted to talk about the treatments or even the diagnosis, out of embarrassment.

"I felt like something needed to be done to educate other firefighters about how to prevent or reduce the likelihood of getting cancer from the job," Irish said.

Irish started the Cancer Prevention Program as a way to educate members of his own department on how best to keep themselves safe. He has since gone on to teach at more than 300 fire departments and spoken with more than 3,500 firefighters.

His program caught the eye of Timothy Graves, another PEF member and Fire Protection Specialist at DHSES who has begun to write a course based on Irish's program.

"It has been a long journey, but I am glad I've been able to talk with people about this," Irish said. "And hopefully some more lives will be saved."

Even though he retired from fire service in 2012, Irish has plans to retire completely, as an SFI and from the cancer prevention program.

"I am proud of the work I've done and I am proud of myself. But I think it is time to pass this all on to younger generations," he said.

When women, labor, and film connect you get cinematic gems

By KATE STICKLES

Time marches on. March Madness. The March on Washington. The word march crops up often in our lives, but during the *month* of March, we commemorate the valuable contributions women have made throughout history.

Women have played a pivotal role throughout the labor movement, so this month, why not break out your favorite snacks and enjoy a history lesson through one of the many films telling their stories?

Here are a few to choose from:

Breaking the News

The PEF Statewide Women's Committee chose this story of a group of women and LGBTQ+ journalists who launch a digital news start-up called *The 19th** -- named after the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote, but with an asterisk to acknowledge Black women and women of color who were omitted -- to screen at the March meeting of the PEF Executive Board. The 19th sought to buck a broken news media system.

A story of America in flux, and the voices often left out of the narrative, *Breaking the News* shows change doesn't come easy -- something that unions and the labor movement know well!

You can watch the movie on [PBS](#).

Norma Rae

No list of labor history movies depicting women would be complete without *Norma Rae*, with its iconic moment of Sally Field grabbing a piece of cardboard and scrawling UNION on it in capital letters and then climbing on a table at a cotton mill as police rush in to arrest her.

The movie tells the story of Crystal Lee Sutton, a North Carolina cotton mill worker turned labor activist, who held union meetings in her house, talked union with mill workers before and after work and during breaks, and whose zeal for unionizing is impressive.

To prepare for their roles in the movie, Field and Beau Bridges, who played Norma Rae's former coworker and new husband Sonny Webster, did stints working in a factory.

Bread and Roses

Based on the Justice for Janitors campaign launched by [SEIU](#), this film portrays the struggles of poorly paid janitorial workers in Los Angeles as they fight for better working conditions and the right to unionize.

While the characters are fictional, the story it tells is true. It spotlights the immigrant community's abuse by employers who threatened deportation for those who tried to organize or defend their rights in the workplace.



Made in Dagenham

In this [British comedy dramatization](#) about the women sewing machinists strike at the Ford Dagenham plant in 1968, gender roles and equal pay take center stage. The strike helped pave the way for the landmark Equal Pay Act of 1970.

Main character Rita O'Grady is one of only 187 women in a workforce of 55,000 men when she rallies female co-workers to fight for equal pay amidst the "man's world" mentality at the plant.

Actress Sally Hawkins prepared for her role by meeting with three of the original Dagenham seamstresses. Her grandmother was also a seamstress at another plant.

Union Maids

This documentary on the history of women's organizing in the 1930s is harder to track down, but it paints a vivid picture of the first to form industrial unions as seen through the eyes of rank-and-file women.

The film is a unique oral history that uses footage from the National Archives to bring viewers into the story.

You can watch *Union Maids* with a library card through [Kanopy](#).

PEF Membership Benefits

Program hosting book signing and reading March 16

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF MBP is fostering a love of reading by hosting a free reading and book signing with Teryn Roberts, author of the children's novel, "I Deserve Better!" from 10 a.m. to noon, March 16, at the Howe Branch of the Albany Public Library, 105 Schuyler St.

Roberts is the cousin of PEF Retiree and former PEF Trustee Maddie Shannon-Roberts. Her debut book has earned a No. 1 spot on Amazon's New Release List.

The book chronicles the story of six-year-old Jay, who receives a call from his father saying he is coming to pick him up – only

to eventually learn his father is not coming. Through colorful illustrations by Sergio Drumond, Roberts takes on the sensitive topic of a young child coping with the emotional roller coaster of dealing with an inconsistent or absent parent.

The book is designed to start a conversation between kids, their parents, teachers and/or therapists. It can help them handle difficult emotions and come out on the other side with greater understanding, confidence, and self-love.



Teryn Roberts
Reading & Book Signing
March 16, 2024

10 a.m.–Noon
Albany Public Library
Howe Branch,
105 Schuyler St., Albany, NY 12202

I Deserve Better! is a picture book designed for children along with parents, teachers, and therapists to start a conversation that lets them handle these difficult emotions and emerge with greater understanding, resilience, confidence, and self-love.



Quality of Work Life Grants



Governor's Office of
Employee Relations

PEF contract provides grant program to improve work life

Through Article 14 of the PS&T contract, PEF divisions can apply for a grant of up to \$1,250 per year for certain kitchen appliances to improve breakroom/lunch areas at facilities that do not have them or where they aren't in good working order.

The Quality of Work Life (QWL) Grants Pilot Program is a reimbursement program that can be used to pay for coffeemakers, microwaves, or refrigerators; the size, type, and quantity is determined by the number of employees the area serves.

From January to April last year, 23 PEF Divisions took advantage of the grant program, which was inactive until now while the contract was negotiated and ratified, and the application process was finalized. In 2022, 28 PEF Divisions participated.

Division 167 Council Leader Patricia Moran said these grants improve morale for members.

"We serve members from two important state agencies – the Office of Mental Health and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities," she said. "This grant has provided needed items to enhance the lives of dedicated PEF members, including a small refrigerator where our EAP coordinator keeps bottles of water when

she meets with staff in crisis, a microwave for a new breakroom in one of our Day Hubs, and a Keurig we utilize while meeting with members," she said.

More Divisions should be taking advantage of this program. It's a way to provide for members without using Division funds.

"In the future, we are hoping that Divisions like ours, where we serve so many members in two different agencies, can qualify for a larger grant amount," Moran said.

Anyone can inquire about the grant, not just Council Leaders. In Divisions without one, Executive Board members can sign applications. You can contact Member Engagement Administrative Assistant Patricia Richardson at patricia.richardson@pef.org or click here for more information.





PEF in the News

Union efforts opposing the State's potential closure of SUNY Downstate hospital are making the rounds in the media, with President Wayne Spence quoted in several. Here is a list of recent coverage about Downstate:

WBLS-FM 107.5: President Spence was the guest for a full hour on the Open Line community affairs talk show about the [future of SUNY Downstate and why it's so critical that it remain open and funded](#) to serve as a vital healthcare hub in Central Brooklyn.

New York Magazine: [Stopping This Hospital Closure Is a Key Test of Black Political Power in New York](#)

WPIX-TV: [Brooklyn residents protest plans to close SUNY Downstate Hospital](#)

WABC-TV: [Rally against plans to close SUNY Downstate Hospital in Brooklyn](#)

The Gothamist/WNYC radio: [SUNY Downstate may close Brooklyn hospital. No one knows where its 150 daily patients will go](#)

The Amsterdam News: [SUNY Downstate Hospital's Uncertain Future](#)

New York Daily News: [Al Sharpton, Zellnor Myrie rally to save Brooklyn hospital: 'We choose to fight'](#)

Politico NY: [Rallying for SUNY Downstate](#)

Continued advocacy for Tier 6 reform

City & State magazine quoted President Spence's legislative hearing testimony on improving Tier 6 as crucial to attracting and retaining skilled public-sector workers. [Read about it here.](#)

Speaking out against proposed prison closures

President Spence was a guest on Spectrum TV's Capital Tonight on March 6, 2024, talking about PEF's opposition to the governor's proposal to close up to five prisons in the coming year with just 90 days' notice instead of the current legally required one-year notice. Watch the interview, [here](#).



PEF seeks to identify all veterans in the union

The PEF Statewide Veterans Committee is working to further develop programming aimed at increasing awareness for veterans by engaging in advocacy and fostering support of legislation that protects the needs of military personnel, veterans and their families.

"We want to build a database here at PEF to identify all active and retired PEF members who are veterans," said David Krobe, a PEF

retiree from Region 1 who chairs the committee. "Thank you for your service and for taking the time to email this survey to us."

Click [here](#) for the fillable form, which all PEF veterans are encouraged to email to Rachel.Mango@pef.org.



Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

SIGN NOW!

PEF reminds members to keep safe in parking lots

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Members continue to report issues related to the safety of parking lots while they travel to and from their State jobs.

Karen Tully, a senior attorney for the State Department, was violently attacked in 2019 while returning to her car in the Elk Street Parking lot in Albany. The lot is owned by the Office of General Services (OGS).

"We as state employees, we pay to park in these lots," Tully said. "The lots are open for the public to walk through. Nobody checks for IDs. It's just not safe."

Tully often works overtime as part of her work. She says that the solutions offered by OGS and other state agencies on how to stay safe weren't enough.

"There isn't always someone you can walk with. You can sit there and talk about all those safety things—and it's the same thing OGS said—to walk with somebody, or if you see something strange, don't go forward," She said. "But this guy who attacked me, he didn't look strange."

During the Joint PEF/State Health and Safety Conference in December 2023, the Article 19 Parking Lot Committee and the Article 18 Health and Safety Committee worked together on a workshop to provide members, like Tully, who park in downtown Albany, best practices on how to stay safe in parking lots. These tips, as well as other initiatives are part of a Parking Lot Safety Pilot Program for Region 8 members, but they apply to all members across the state.

The committees want to empower members by reminding them of simple tips, like keep an eye on everyone in the parking lot—even those who may not seem like a threat, don't wear headphones, and keep valuable out of sight and have your keys always ready.

Additionally, whenever possible, PEF recommends walking with a co-worker, or to inform a co-worker, friends, or family if there are unsafe conditions or any feelings of unsafety.

The Parking Lot Safety Pilot Program is developing other tips and items that PEF members can use to help navigate parking lots, including a small flashlight that can be easily attached to keys or bags for ease of use.

If an incident occurs, remember to report it as soon as possible to agency management, PEF Health and Safety (HealthandSafety@pef.org) and parking facility management. PEF's Parking Committee should also be notified via email at parking@pef.org.

New York winters can be tough, so when sidewalks and walkways become icy, be sure to wear suitable footwear. Finally, as with any emergency, members should always know where their phone is and dial 911 if necessary.

PARKING SAFETY TIPS

VEHICLE SAFETY

- Be aware of your surroundings—increase your awareness of your safety as you exit or enter your car.
- Park near lighted areas, emergency phones, or attendant's booth.
- Walk with a buddy.
- Keep valuables, including purses, purchases, and devices out of sight.
- Always lock your doors.

SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

- As you make your way to or from your vehicle, be aware of slip, trip, and fall risks.
- Avoid uneven areas of roadways or walkways.
- Whenever possible, take sidewalks or other authorized pathways.
- Wear suitable footwear with good traction to help avoid slipping.
- When walking in bad weather, go with extreme caution.

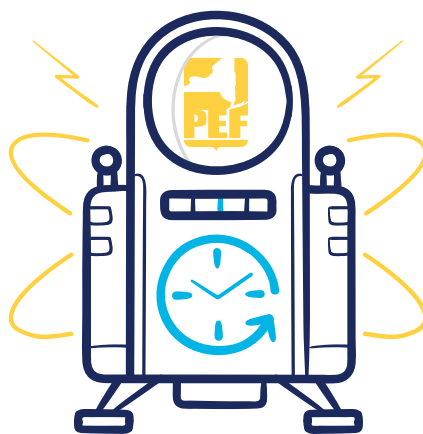
REPORTING

- Report all incidents to your agency management and PEF H&S Committee.
- Immediately report injuries to your employer and file for Workers' Compensation benefits if injured.
- Report any parking incidents to the parking facility management immediately.
- Report any parking incidents to the PEF Parking Committee at parking@pef.org.

FOR EMERGENCIES

- Employees should be prepared to call for help, so have your phone ready.
- Have emergency contacts saved as contacts in your phone.
- Call 911 in case of an emergency.





Blast from the Past: Déjà vu at Downstate

The past has come back to haunt New York City's only state-run hospital. A recent proposal by SUNY Chancellor John King seeks to "transform" SUNY Downstate Medical Center, which would effectively close the hospital and farm out some of its services to other healthcare providers in the city. The impact would be devastating in Central Brooklyn, where Downstate is the fourth largest employer and the primary healthcare option for the borough's low-income Medicaid patients.

It's all eerily similar to 2012.

In March of that year, PEF took to the streets to protest plans to close Kingsboro Psychiatric Center and SUNY Downstate. Hundreds of PEF members, led by then PEF President Ken Brynien, shared one message to the governor, the legislature and then Office of Mental Health Commissioner Michael Hogan: Stop the closures.

"If Downstate were to close, it would create a health crisis in central Brooklyn," said former PEF Downstate Council Leader Don Morgenstern, at the time.

Then, as now, PEF focused efforts on making sure the community and State legislators knew the value of the work being done at Downstate, especially by PEF members. The State-run hospital is home to the only kidney transplant center in Brooklyn and offers specialized services such as cardiac and stroke care, oncology, and a level 4 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

PEF President Wayne Spence was part of the fightback campaign in 2012, serving as a union vice president.

"Staff at SUNY Downstate worked hard after being designated a COVID-only hospital," Spence said at a rally at the State Capitol in Albany on Feb. 6 of this year. "But that would not have been possible if we didn't fight to keep it open in 2012. How many people would've

died without SUNY Downstate? Thank God, we got it right. So why are we here again to fight for this hospital and this community? Shame!"

It wasn't until later in 2013 that the future of SUNY Downstate started to look up. The State legislature refused to introduce a bill from former Governor Andrew Cuomo that would have led to the privatization of the hospital.

But since 2013, the State has refused to invest adequate money and resources into Downstate to help it flourish. And so history is repeating itself, as State officials cite the institution's lack of funding as the reason why they released a hastily proposed plan that unions like United University Professionals (UUP) and PEF had no say in helping develop.

Just like in 2012-2013, the solidarity from a multi-union coalition is what keeps the movement strong.

"The coalition is strong, and we have all pledged to save SUNY Downstate," Morgenstern said in 2013.

The new coalition, called "Brooklyn Needs Downstate," demands that the State reinvest in the facility, helping it provide the specialized care that the approximately 400 PEF members who work there help deliver to the community.

Rallies and actions are planned throughout the month. PEF members can engage in two ways: [Click here to send a letter](#) to your State Senator and Assemblymember urging them to keep Downstate open, and visit [UUP's website](#) to learn more about the campaign and stay informed about future events.



Fight to save Brooklyn's health care

Story and photos by
DEBORAH A. MILES

PEF is putting up a passionate fight and pulling out all the stops to preserve health care services in Brooklyn.

The reason for the fight is the state's plans to close Kingsboro Psychiatric Center, close beds at SUNY Downstate University Hospital, and shift its inpatient operations to the Long Island College Hospital campus.

These plans would cripple mental health care in central Brooklyn and diminish emergency care.

Brooklyn is the single highest user of mental health services in the state. If Kingsboro shuts down, Kings County will be without long-term mental health services for its mentally ill residents.

The union has been fighting hard to reverse the state's decision.

The first effort came January 11 when hundreds of Brooklyn's health care providers rallied and chanted in front of the Brooklyn Bridge Marriott where Stephen Berger, an investment banker behind the closure plans, was participating in a forum on Brooklyn's hospitals.

Involving legislators

The union's next move was a visit to state legislators. PEF Vice President Pat Baker, Region 11 Coordinator Jemma Marie-Hanson and Kingsboro's council leader, Jasmine Wilson-LaFond, along with dozens of members who were bused to Albany from Brooklyn, spoke with

lawmakers January 24.

Baker told more than a dozen state Assembly and Senate members brought together by Assembly Member Vito Lopez of Brooklyn, "The closing of Kingsboro is a huge mistake. Services and jobs are at stake. We need to take action, and we need to take it now."

As a result, a task force was formed by Lopez and state Sen. Kevin Parker of Brooklyn with leaders from PEF and the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA).

Baker said the task force has been meeting with Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

"Until the state budget is signed, PEF can fight this," Baker said. "The Legislature can amend Article 7 bills, which may include Kingsboro. This is only the beginning of our fight."

Community awareness

Wilson-LaFond and Don Morgenstern, PEF council leader from SUNY Downstate, organized union volunteers to blanket the central Brooklyn area with fliers about the plans to close beds and shift services to Staten Island.

Twenty-five thousand fliers were distributed in mid-February to business owners, residents and local churches.

Morgenstern explained why Brooklynites need to get involved.

"If Downstate's emergency room is

closed, it's not an overstatement to say some people may die. This is exactly the type of community that needs government services. It is not an area the state should abandon," he said.

PEF, along with CSEA and United University Professions, designed and placed ads in nearly a dozen Brooklyn newspapers, and on billboards in bus shelters near Kingsboro and SUNY Downstate.

"We need to get the message out every way we can," Marie-Hanson said. "People in

the community need to know what is happening and what they can do to help."

One member who became aware of the fight-back is working on a



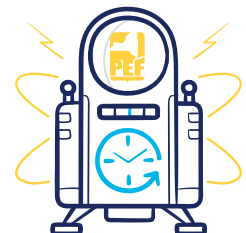
nationwide petition on change.org.

Another rally was held with CSEA members in front of Berger's Manhattan office building February 8 that attracted NY1 and other media outlets. Another rally may be held in March.

Persuasive testimony

Baker also testified February 14 at a joint budget hearing on mental hygiene. Mental Health Commissioner Michael Hogan was the first to testify and was grilled by legislators about the closing of

[Click here to view the March 2012 Communicator](#)



Upcoming PSWP Trainings: Data Analysis, Resilience, and Client Engagement Strategies for Diverse Challenges

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.



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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/>

Union Leader Spotlight:

Pamela August

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

How long have you been a PEF member and what leadership roles do you hold?

I have been a PEF member for over 16 years, and I have been a steward for about 12 years. I was treasurer for two years and have been a council leader with approximately 1,300 constituents since January 2023. At the same time, I was elected to be the Statewide Labor/Management chair for the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

I stepped up to these positions so that I could make changes in our Division and my agency.

How have you been supporting your members?

I've worked at getting information out to our members. We've reinstituted our bulletin boards on the floors up to date. We just ran a survey to members to find out what's important to them. We hold two membership meetings each year and we listen to our members.

I love to help people by answering all PEF-related questions. I also wanted to change labor/ management by writing thoughtful, clear agenda items. We have been very successful at creating a friendly environment between labor and management.

But there is still a lot of work to be done. I couldn't do it alone, and I give much credit to the council officers and members on our labor/ management team.





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](https://www.pef.org/careers).

www.pef.org/careers-at-pef



Negotiations begin for first 10 Medicare Part D drugs

In February, I informed you about some proposals in this year's state budget and asked members and retirees to act. Today, I'm sharing an article about the Medicare drug negotiations mandated under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed by President Joe Biden. Please continue to stay informed, engaged, and active around the issues that matter most!

Medicare Drug Negotiations Officially Under Way

By Lindsey Copeland and our friends at Medicare Rights

On February 1, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sent initial offers to manufacturers of the first 10 Part D drugs subject to price negotiation under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a significant implementation milestone.

As announced in August, HHS selected these medications based on criteria outlined in the IRA, such as high Medicare spending and lack of competition. The resulting list includes drugs that millions of Medicare beneficiaries rely on to treat conditions such as cancer, diabetes, blood clots, heart failure, autoimmune conditions, and chronic kidney disease.

HHS estimates that in 2022, Medicare paid \$46.4 billion for the 10 selected drugs, up from \$20 billion in 2018, and that Part D enrollees paid \$3.4 billion out of pocket. While the exact savings realized by the IRA's negotiation program will depend on the final prices, lower costs are expected system wide. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) anticipates negotiation will save Medicare \$98.5 billion over the coming decade as well as reduce expenses for beneficiaries and taxpayers. By lowering drug prices and increasing affordability, CBO projects the changes will help people with Medicare adhere to their treatment plans, improving health outcomes and reducing the need for more costly interventions.

The negotiations will continue over the next several months. HHS plans to publish the final prices this fall, and they will take effect in 2026. Additional medications will be selected for negotiation in future years, allowing the number of drugs with negotiated prices to accumulate over time.

Importantly, other IRA policies that are or will soon be in effect further bolster beneficiary health care access and affordability. Several key revisions took effect in 2023, such as the \$35 limit per monthly insulin prescription, the availability of no-cost Part D vaccines, and reduced coinsurance on certain Part B drugs. This year, even more people with Medicare will see relief. In January, the IRA's Part D structural changes began to take shape—the law eliminated



enrollee expenses in the Part D catastrophic coverage phase, essentially holding out-of-pocket costs to roughly \$3,250 in 2024. It also expanded the full Part D Low Income Subsidy (LIS), also known as Extra Help, to people with incomes at or below 150% of poverty. And in 2025, the law will cap Part D drug costs at \$2,000 (indexed annually for inflation) and allow enrollees to pay those expenses in monthly installments, promoting financial security and peace of mind.

Medicare Rights welcomes these long-sought modernizations. Collectively, the IRA's drug pricing provisions will lower costs and strengthen coverage for millions of older adults and people with disabilities. We look forward to a timely implementation process, and to building upon the IRA's historic reforms.

For more information

To learn more about the IRA and ways to lower drug costs, visit the recently launched HHS IRA resource hub [LowerDrugCosts.gov](https://www.lowerdrugcosts.gov). According to HHS, this new website is intended to be a "one-stop-shop for information related to the drug pricing provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act and the implementation process, and resources for Medicare enrollees and other interested parties."

Letters to the Editor

Tackling grievances

To the Editor:

Why is there no consequence when the state fails to meet its time requirements for grievances on behalf of union members (many waiting for years and still no resolution), while the Union and its members are strictly held to their time requirements without excuse? What action is being taken by union leadership to resolve this matter?

Jim Dwyer
Oxford, NY

Editor's note: PEF is working diligently to move grievances through the system. We demand step meetings and decisions when the state is delaying, and advance when warranted where no decision has been issued. Article 17s (Out-of-Title Work) have been discussed regularly at Executive Labor Management meetings and the state has hired additional staff to work through the backlog of grievances.

Clarify final average salary and retirement age

To the Editor:

1. "PEF supports reducing employee contributions, increasing the 2% pension factor at 20 years of service, restoring the final average salary contribution to a three-year window versus the current five-year window." I thought it was currently a three-year average. No?
2. "... and re-establishing the ability of career employees to retire at age 55 or older with 30 or more years of public service." Employees can already do this, can't they?

Erik Rutnik
Capital Region

Editor's note: Regarding the salary calculations, for members in Tiers 4 and 5, there is a three-year final average salary calculation benefit. For members in Tier 6 (hired after April 2, 2012), it is a five-year final average salary calculation. In answer to your retirement age question, members in Tier 4 (Sept. 1, 1983, to Dec. 31, 2009) can retire at age 55 or older with 30 or more years of service. Members in Tier 5 (hired after Jan. 1, 2010, and before March 31, 2012) must be age 62 to retire without penalty and members in Tier 6 (hired after April 2, 2012) must be age 63 to retire without penalty.

With the state's recruitment and retention problems, making the state a competitive employer with a robust pension plan could help fill some of the 12,500 vacancies across state agencies. Improved staffing will benefit both PEF members and the people they serve. We have a few letter-writing campaigns you can participate in [here](#).





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 thecomunicator@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/>



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.

Barbara Bertucio is a curatorial visitor services specialist 1 at the Office of General Services in Albany.

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.

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.

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.

Ann Krenn is an Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator at Groveland Correctional Facility in Sonyea.

Roxeen Mundy is an information technology specialist 2 at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.

Rose Niang is an investigative specialist 1 at the Department of Education in Manhattan.

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.

Vicki Sweet is a business systems analyst at the Worker's Compensation Board in Menands.

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 174 and 175 of the [2023-26 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.





March 5, 2024

A multi-union Fix Tier 6 rally drew large crowds to the Million Dollar Staircase in the New York State Capitol, including many PEF members.

February 28, 2024

PEF Vice President Darlene Williams talks to a member at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center, which has kicked off a campaign to "Stop Workplace Bullying" at the facility, leading up to a public rally scheduled for May 1.



March 5, 2024

A PEF Mobile Billboard traveled around the State Capitol and the Harriman State Campus the week of March 4-8, letting everyone know why "Brooklyn Needs Downstate!"



February 24, 2024

The PEF Region 9 Health & Safety conference with union members learning about opioid treatments, ergonomics, and much more.



February 22, 2024

A productive PEF information session at Sagamore Children's Psychiatric Center (PEF Division 178) in Dix Hills, as members stopped by to meet with VP Darlene Williams and staff from PEF Organizing and Health & Safety, as well as their local leaders. Many of the questions that were answered at the meeting were discussed during last week's Telephone Town Hall, which you can listen to [here](#).



February 21, 2024

A great turnout at the PEF Division 213 membership meeting at the Bronx Psychiatric Center -- where members heard about the union's legislative and budget priorities, updates on contract implementation, and the importance of COPE contributions for federal lobbying efforts.

