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New York State employees will soon have a new dental plan

Kingsboro PC members say enough is enough; call for a stop to bullying with days of action and rally

Eclipse expected to bring record-breaking crowds to Niagara Region; PEF members have been planning for more than a year

Executive Board moves forward on business at latest meeting

PEF gears up for Wellness Fair and book giveaway



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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



PEF persistence pays off!

The first quarter of 2024 is in the books! The New York State budget will be finalized soon, and I'm confident that many of PEF's priorities will be included. I thank each of you who took the time to send an email or a letter or called your lawmakers to voice support for PEF's priorities. The PEF Communications and Legislative Departments report that members sent almost 4,500 emails and signed about 8,000 letters at various meetings and events across the State. Without your voices amplifying the union's lobbying efforts, legislators would not have known about so many of the issues plaguing the State workforce.

This month's lead story is one I know many of you will be very glad to read. Ever since I was first elected PEF President in 2015, I've heard from members all over the State how terrible the EmblemHealth dental plan is. There aren't nearly enough participating dentists and the benefits really amount to nothing but a coupon for State employees. Not anymore. Effective some time this fall, after a 180-day implementation period, [Anthem Blue Cross will become the dental insurer in the NYS Health Insurance Plan](#). PEF was the loudest voice in the room when it came to making this happen and I'm grateful to all of you for keeping the issue front and center. It took more than a decade of advocacy, but the persistence of union members and staff paid off and now public employees across the State will benefit. Congratulations to everyone.

I'd also like to take a moment to commend the members at [Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn](#), who are fed up with the treatment some of them receive from management and have gone public with a campaign to call it out. PEF activists have participated in a series of actions each week since February, recorded audio testimonials about their experiences, and are building toward a May 1 rally at the facility, to which we'll invite the media and legislators so they can hear Kingsboro's message: Stop Workplace Bullying!

This issue is hitting your in-boxes just five days before a once-in-a-lifetime event – the total solar eclipse that people from all over the world will witness across a swath of western, central and northern New York on April 8. [PEF members have been preparing for this since 2020](#). I hope everyone stays safe and has fun – especially if traveling in busy areas like Buffalo, where the traffic is expected to be intense.

Finally, I want to recognize a special member who does all she can for PEF, for her community, and abroad. [Joan Rosegreen](#), a nurse and PEF council leader at SUNY Downstate, recently returned to her native country (and mine!), Jamaica, to help deliver healthcare to those in need, and is already gearing up for another global adventure later this year in Singapore. I salute Joan and every PEF member fighting to make a real difference in the lives of the people we serve.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President



New York State employees will soon have a new dental plan

By **ROB MERRILL**

It took years of hard work and tenacity on the part of PEF leaders and members, but New York State will replace EmblemHealth with Anthem Blue Cross as the dental provider in the New York State Health Insurance Plan this fall.

This is the culmination of years of effort. PEF led the way in pushing for a better dental plan for state workers, which will now benefit other bargaining units such as those represented by Council 82, OMCE, NYSCOPBA, and the State Police. PEF members made their feelings clear to their elected leaders, complaining that EmblemHealth was deficient and inadequate to meet their needs. Too few dentists accepted the plan, and the reimbursement rates for members who received out of network dental care were paltry.

"We saw all these dentists walking away from the Emblem network because they claim they are losing money and they can't afford to treat our members," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "When I became President in 2015, I started pushing for changes to the plan."

PEF members have been most critical of the plan in parts of upstate New York where there are not enough dentists who accept EmblemHealth, forcing members to pay high out-of-pocket costs. The union put out its own Request for Proposals (RFP) in 2020 and

learned that there are other dental carriers with better networks and less expensive administrative fees than what the State currently pays EmblemHealth.

"Our view is that Emblem was really nothing but a coupon for our members," said PEF President Spence, "not nearly good enough to provide PEF members with the comprehensive dental care they deserve."

EmblemHealth's balance billing resulted in significant out-of-pocket expenses for members as the number of in-network providers dropped. Balance billing occurs when a member uses out-of-network providers or when they receive services not covered by the plan. Dentists advised that they dropped the plan, in part, because EmblemHealth's reimbursement rates are very low.

History of PEF advocacy

More than 15 years ago, PEF secured a side letter in the 2007-2011 PS&T contract to fund a comprehensive analysis of the State's Dental and Vision benefits. That study resulted in a recommendation of alternate means to provide benefits that might have offered enrollees enhanced benefits while potentially decreasing the overall cost to the State.



When the State did not accept that proposal, PEF did what unions do best — continued to fight. During the COVID pandemic in 2020, PEF put out its own Request for Proposals (RFP) for new dental carriers in order to get a better sense of the benefits landscape and what might be possible. That process educated the negotiating team about typical fees and what other vendors offered.

During negotiations for the 2019-2023 PEF contract, PEF secured some upgrades to the dental plan – including an increase in the maximum annual benefit per covered person from \$2,300 to \$3,000. Most importantly, the union convinced the State to put out its own RFP for a new dental carrier – something they had not done in more than 20 years. But when President Spence learned during the 2023-2026 contract talks that the State had not yet done so, the PEF Contract Team took it up a notch. PEF's current contract includes a \$400-per-year annual stipend until the State enters into a new dental services contract. The \$400 is payable in each fiscal year in which a new dental services contract is not in place for any portion of that fiscal year. The 2023 stipend was paid in March 2024, costing the state more than \$24 million (approximately 51,000 PEF members times \$400, plus administrative costs). PEF knew with dollar amounts like that the State would have a major incentive to fix the problem.

The State secured responses to their RFP for a new dental carrier and PEF was involved in evaluating the proposals.

“Union representatives were part of the interview committee,” said PEF Contract Administration Director Debra Greenberg. “We reviewed the RFP responses provided to us by the State.”

The State approved Anthem Blue Cross to administer the NYSHIP dental program in late March 2024. The new plan is expected to take effect in September or October 2024, following a 180-day implementation period. The exact date and all revised plan materials will be provided by the State as the date approaches.



Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

SIGN NOW!



Kingsboro PC members mobilize to call out workplace bullying

By **KATE STICKLES**

The consensus among staff at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn is clear: It's time to stand up and fight back against the rampant bullying, retaliation, and nepotism that members face every day on the job.

"This is what our members want," said PEF Region 11 Coordinator and Kingsboro recreation therapist Bernadette O'Connor. "They said to us, enough is enough. They are sick and tired, and we've got to do something. I work here and I know firsthand what's going on at Kingsboro. It is the worst that I've ever seen it with the disparities and bullying."

Issues at Kingsboro include bullying, nepotism, short staffing, and retaliation. Members are not being considered for positions they are fully qualified to hold, and agency workers are being hired to fill vacancies over permanent staff nurses.

Before going public with their "Stop Workplace Bullying" campaign, the union sat down with Kingsboro officials at the labor/management table, but the issues were not satisfactorily addressed.

"They just ignored us," O'Connor said. "We spoke with President Spence and as a membership we let the president know what was happening."

The union then took it up a notch and members, PEF President Wayne Spence, Vice President Darlene Williams, and PEF staff met with the statewide Office of Mental Health commissioner's second-in-command and her team.

"We gave them 30 days to respond to the issues we brought up," O'Connor said. "A letter was written to them, describing all the issues members faced, and what the union would like to see happen. We got back an answer, and it was unsatisfactory."

Another meeting, with senior OMH representatives, PEF staff and elected officials, plus six rank-and-file nurses from Kingsboro, was equally unsuccessful and members at Kingsboro decided it was time to go public with their message.

"The things we asked for they didn't recognize," O'Connor said. "We needed to hit the streets. That was the decision of the entire membership at Kingsboro."

O'Connor said she, too, faces bullying and retaliation, especially considering her role as a union leader and activist.

"This is the way management treats you here on the grounds of Kingsboro," she said. "They treat you even worse if you are standing up for what is right."

When meetings fail, take action

PEF Division 252 at Kingsboro and the union as a whole are not accepting the inadequate resolutions offered by OMH. A public campaign began in February, when members met at Kingsboro and agreed to move forward with a "Stop Workplace Bullying" campaign.

On March 6, red shirts flooded the building, the first in a series of visual reminders to management that PEF members won't stand for the status quo. On March 13, staff proudly wore buttons emblazoned with the stop bullying message. On March 20, PEF distributed signs and members took pictures of them in their cars or in groups holding them up. And on March 27 a lunchtime rally was held at Assembly Hall in the psychiatric center.

"Everyone was excited," O'Connor said. "These activities were planned for us to get in the mood leading up to a rally on May 1."

On April 3, the actions will continue, with members displaying signs and buttons wherever they can and on April 10, there will be a balloon release, during which members will write what they are going through on a balloon and then release it. On April 17, stickers will join the previous "Stop Workplace Bullying" gear. April 24 will be "Blackout Day," where members will be dressed in all black.

The big rally will take place on May 1 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. outside the facility. PEF is inviting elected officials from the surrounding area, members of the community, and the media to attend so they, too, can learn what is happening at Kingsboro.

O'Connor commended former Division 252 Council Leader Robin Hamilton Browne, now retired, and PEF Organizer Lisa Pinkard for their roles pulling together the fightback campaign.

"When you've been taken advantage of and everybody is looking the other way, there is a way to be heard," O'Connor said. "Do a day of action and stand up for the members and yourselves."

Tell us your Toxic Tales; support the campaign

If you have a tale of workplace bullying to share, visit PEF's website dedicated to the [campaign](#) or reach out to Communicator@pef.org.

Participation will help PEF fight for passage of legislation the union drafted last year that defines workplace bullying and requires training for employers and employees to reduce harassment in workplaces. It was passed by the Assembly Majority but is awaiting consideration by the Senate.

You can also send a letter to your elected officials supporting the legislation, [here](#).





Eclipse expected to bring record-breaking crowds to Niagara Region

By **KATE STICKLES**

In 2020, staff at New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (Parks) cast their eyes four years into the future – to April 8, 2024 – when a total [solar eclipse’s path of totality would be passing directly over Niagara Falls State Park](#).

A year ago, they began planning in earnest for an event Parks staff are comparing to the time Nik Wallenda tightroped over the falls in 2012.

“Every summer holiday weekend is a big event, so we’ve been pulling from those playbooks to prepare,” said Angela Berti, who joined PEF in 2007 and is the Director of Public Affairs for the Niagara Region. “Our teams are used to handling big crowds, especially at Niagara Falls, but for this event it has been a matter of working with other local, state and federal agencies to tackle things like, how do we move traffic as smoothly as possible and how do we make sure everyone stays safe?”

“We have been working very closely with the Department of Transportation, New York State Police, the Thruway Authority, and the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services on traffic management plans and other topics needed to plan an event this large,” she said.

Not all planning is crowd logistics

Niagara Falls is known for its ticketed attractions, fireworks over the falls, hiking, environmental education, and more. Visitors will be able to enjoy those in the hours and days leading up to and after the eclipse.

“We have been working to provide advance messaging to our patrons, so they know what to expect,” said PEF member Lindsey Presti, a Parks manager who has been with New York state for 27 years. “There are events throughout the city of Niagara Falls for the weekend and the day of the eclipse. We have made sure to provide opportunities for visitors to ‘arrive early and stay late’ by keeping attractions, such as the Cave of the Winds and the Maid of the Mist, open later than usual.



"There will also be two fireworks shows in the evening, our partners in the city are having bands and food trucks and all sorts of entertainment," she said. "Our environmental educators have planned a large- than-usual lineup of activities and walks to provide additional activities outside of viewing the eclipse."

PEF member Angelina Weibel, who joined the union in 2015, but has worked at Parks since 2007, said environmental educators have been including eclipse and solar programming in many of their field trip activities since last spring.

"Our eclipse programming began with a trivia night at Niagara Falls State Park," Weibel said. "Since then, we have hosted pinhole viewer making classes; presented 'When the Eclipse was Last Here,' all about the 1925 eclipse and what the world and Niagara Falls were like 99 years ago; and hosted a cooperative program with the Aquarium of Niagara on 'Animal Response to a Total Solar Eclipse.'"

Programming will continue right up until the weekend of the eclipse, including a Tiny Tots program all about space, a Fun in the Sun craft program, and the Raven Steals the Sun, presented by Perry Ground, a master Storyteller of the Onondaga Nation.

Weibel said there will be increased hikes Friday through Sunday and there will be multiple Education Stations with hands-on, interactive information about the eclipse and the park itself at both Niagara Falls and Buffalo Harbor State Park. Parks will also have Braille and tactile media, and [LightSound](#) devices at each location.

The LightSound device was developed in 2017 as a tool for the Blind and Low Vision (BLV) community to experience a solar eclipse with sound. The device uses a technique called sonification to convert light intensity to sound. As the moon eclipses the sun during the solar and the day darkens, the LightSound device will change its musical tone.

Niagara Falls will not only be in the path of totality, offering visitors a chance to see the often-talked-of sun's corona, but it will also play host to scientists from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

"I'd like to say we had to lobby to woo them, but they actually reached out to us and asked if they could come to Niagara Falls as one of their key cities for this event," Berti said. "We were thrilled to say yes, and it has been interesting planning with them. One day, someone couldn't make a call because they were in space. You don't hear that a lot!"

[Check out NASA's official eclipse page on April 8 if you aren't in the path of totality.](#)

Opening campgrounds, increasing staff

For the expected masses, Niagara Falls and other state parks in the path of totality and surrounding areas are de-winterizing campgrounds and preparing for the camping season much earlier than usual.

"We don't usually open our campgrounds until mid-May, but Governor Hochul directed us to open for the eclipse so the team had to work to de-winterize and prepare during a season when it is still actually snowing out there and we don't have the normal number of staff as we would during actual camping season," Berti said.

Parks has also arranged extra staffing for the event, brought in portable toilets, has tow trucks on standby, and will have EMT staff at the park.

"I want to highlight how hard everyone is working to make this a truly memorable, safe event for our visitors," Presti said. "We have staff coming in from all over the state for the weekend, but also so many other agencies have put in extra hours. It has been very impressive to see and be a part of this effort. We are accustomed to large crowds at Niagara Falls State Park, but this is a once-in-a-lifetime event."

Presti said the timing of the eclipse is also perfect because 2024 marks the centennial of the New York State Parks system.

"This is a pretty exciting way for our park to start it off!" she said.



Contributed by NY State Parks



Executive Board moves forward on business at latest meeting

By **NAJEE WALKER**

At the first Executive Board meeting of 2024, PEF leaders approved the union's Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget, sent a tentative contract for ratification to members at Allegany County; and heard from U.S. Senator Kristen Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and State Senators Samra Brouk and Neil Breslin.

2024-25 budget highlights

PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue proposed a balanced budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year. The budget reflects increased revenues from membership dues, grants, and other funds and projects spending for committees, departments, divisions and more.

"We tried to fund committees, departments, and all of these things to their pre-pandemic levels and this budget reflects that," said Donahue.

The budget shows a projected increase of \$3.2 million from membership dues, and an annual revenue increase of \$1 million.

The largest expenditures, as they are every year, come from union leave, taxes, staff salaries and benefits. Those items account for more than 47% of the budget. The two other highest projected expenses are about 23% for per capita and affiliation fees (money PEF pays to

its international parent unions, the American Federation of Teachers and Service Employees International Union) and about 11% for operating expenses.

PEF is also ramping up advertising expenditures by \$117,500 as it advocates on several fronts, including initiatives to stop proposed prison closures, the fight to reform Tier 6, the Stop Workplace Bullying campaign, and the effort to save and modernize SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

The executive board voted to approve the budget, which funds the union from April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025.

Allegany County Contract

Members of PEF who work for Allegany County in New York's Southern Tier (PEF Region 2) will soon vote on a proposed contract, after the Executive Board approved the bargaining unit's tentative agreement (TA) with the State.

If approved by members, the contract would provide a retroactive raise of 3.5% as of Jan. 1, 2024. Another 3.5% raise would be paid out in 2025. A 30-year longevity payment of \$3,000 is also included, to be paid on the employment anniversary date of eligible members who have reached that service milestone.



The TA also makes Juneteenth (June 19) an annual holiday for Allegany County workers. In addition, the county has the option of adding Christmas Eve as a paid holiday in years when both Christmas Eve and Christmas fall during normal workweeks.

Lastly, the TA gives the county the power to determine when "snowplow season" begins and ends, which affects the seasonal duration of four-day, 10-hour work weeks.

The proposed deal runs through Dec. 31, 2025.

Senators support PEF

Sen. Samra Brouk, who represents portions of Monroe County and the Greater Rochester Area, praised PEF members and the Executive Board for their constant work. Despite the problems they may face at work, Brouk said public service workers continue to show up and care about the work they do.

"The pride that you have for that work motivates me to show up even harder for you," Brouk said.

Brouk pledged that the legislature is behind PEF as the union pushes to reform Tier 6 of the State pension plan. The State Senate's "one-house" budget reduces the final average salary calculation for pensions from five to three years and excludes overtime from contribution calculations until March 31, 2026 – two proposals that PEF supports.

PEF also invited longtime PEF ally Sen. Neil Breslin, the longest-tenured New York State Senator, to address the board. He is not seeking reelection in November. He fondly recalled working with PEF to advance organized labor throughout his decades of service.

"PEF has been totally on my side. I don't think we have ever disagreed," said Breslin. "I don't recall any bill where I said 'Nah, I don't think so,' and so my job was to work for you."

PEF President Wayne Spence and Vice President Randi DiAntonio, who chairs the union's Statewide Political Action Committee (SWPAC), presented Breslin with a plaque, thanking him for his 28 years of partnership and service.

U.S. Senator Kristen Gillibrand appeared via Zoom as well. Gillibrand pioneered legislation and programs to help employees ease the burden of their student loans.

"This is an important moment for labor," said Gillibrand.

Under reforms supported by Gillibrand and implemented by the Biden Administration, more than 800,000 public service employees have seen some form of loan forgiveness, including many PEF members.

"I'm grateful to hear that so many of your members have been able to get their loans forgiven because of their public service," said Gillibrand.

The board voted to accept the SWPAC's endorsement of Sen. Gillibrand as she runs for another six-year term in the U.S. Senate this November.

Endorsements for New York's elections

The board also accepted the SWPAC's recommendation to endorse State Senator Tim Kennedy, who is running in a special election on April 30, 2024, for Congressional District 26 in Western New York. The seat was vacated by U.S. Rep. Brian Higgins in February, after he served for 19 years.

Assembly District 147, also in Western New York, will see candidates running for the seat later this year. The primary takes place on June 25, 2024. All regions voted unanimously to endorse Mitch Martin in the Republican primary, and the board accepted their recommendation.

The next PEF Executive Board meeting will be held May 30 and 31 in Albany.



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PEF Secretary Treasurer Joe Donahue speaks from a landing in the Million Dollar Staircase at the New York State Capitol during a multi-union Fix Tier 6 rally on March 5, 2024.

State Senate and Assembly budget proposals line up with PEF priorities

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The State Senate and Assembly's "one-house" budget proposals were released on March 11, 2024. PEF has been working hard since Governor Hochul's State of the State address and release of the Executive Budget proposal in January to advance the needs of PEF members in the final budget, which is due April 1, 2024.

Thanks to the advocacy of PEF members and lobbying by the PEF Legislative team, several of PEF's major priorities are reflected in the proposals released by the Senate and Assembly, including support for SUNY Downstate and Tier 6 reform.

"The New York State Senate Majority provides the support necessary to ensure that the critical services provided by SUNY Downstate Medical Center remain available to the residents of Central Brooklyn while also establishing a working group of stakeholders to develop a sustainability plan for continued long-term operation of the facility as a state-owned and operated entity," said PEF President Wayne Spence in a press release when the Senate budget was released. "The Senate also advances responsible and affordable improvements to the Tier 6 pension plan designed to increase public sector hiring and retention and reduce the more than \$1 billion the state currently spends on overtime compensation due to low staffing."

Bills introduced by Senators Zellnor Myrie and Robert Jackson address two of PEF's top priorities – funding and maintaining SUNY Downstate as a state-run hospital, and reforming Tier 6 of the State pension plan.

Myrie's bill (S.8732) creates a commission to modernize Downstate Medical Center. While the Assembly does not yet have a corresponding bill, there is other legislation in the Assembly's budget that provides aid to the Brooklyn hospital.

Tier 6 reform is included in both one-house budgets. The major change involves reducing the final average salary calculation from five years to three. A three-year final average salary calculation is what Tier 4 members enjoy. Currently, the final average salary calculation for Tier 6 members is based on the last five years of a members' employment.

Additionally, a new Senate bill extends legislation enacted during the pandemic to exclude overtime from pension contribution rates. Since April 2022, the exclusion of overtime has resulted in lower pension contribution rates for those in Tier 6. The legislation is set to sunset on April 1, 2024, and the proposed extension would move that sunset to March 31, 2026.



Other PEF-supported policies in the one-house budgets include:

- Expanding revenue for the Department of Labor to enforce violations and protect workers and businesses (Senate)
- \$22 million to add 125 state-operated beds to the Office of Mental Health (Senate & Assembly);
- Rejection of the Governor's request to allow her to close up to five State correctional facilities with only 90-days notice (Assembly);
- A rejection of Interstate Nurse Licensure Compacts and steps to regulate Artificial Intelligence at state agencies (Senate & Assembly);
- Ending the lag payroll and salary deferral program, which results in new employees not receiving their first paycheck for weeks after their hire date (Senate & Assembly);

PEF members can do their part by continuing to pressure lawmakers to support PEF's priorities. Nearly 2,000 members have emailed their legislators demanding fixes to Tier 6 of the pension plan, but there are seven other active letter-writing campaigns available on the union website – from saving SUNY Downstate, to keeping retiree healthcare costs in check, to stopping the fast tracking of prison closures. [Click here to read about them all and make your voice heard in Albany.](#)

Performance awards (lump sum longevity payments) to be paid in April 2024



The Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) has released [Payroll Bulletin 2211](#) providing for payment of the April 2024 Performance Awards (also known as Lump Sum Longevity Payments) for PEF members who are eligible.

Per the 2023-2026 PEF/State Agreement, the five-year performance award payment is \$1,500, the 10-year payment is \$3,000, and the 15-year payment is \$4,500. The April 2024 performance awards are based on years at top of salary grade. Next year's April 2025 performance awards will be based on years of State service instead of years at top of salary grade.

The Office of the State Comptroller will process this payment via direct deposit. For employees who do not have direct deposit, this payment will be processed in a separate check. Members on the Institution Payroll will receive payment on April 18, 2024. Those on the Administration Payroll will be paid April 24, 2024.

Please direct any questions about the payment schedule or eligibility to your [PEF Field Representative](#).



PEF contract money to be paid this Spring

By KATE STICKLES

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

\$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 was for 2023 and was paid last month (March 2024). PEF will advise members if there will be a 2024 stipend given the State signed a new dental services contract with Anthem Blue Cross in late March 2024 that will go into effect on Sept. 1, 2024.

\$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 will 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 2023-2026 contract, \$600 each year. Proof was initially due to agencies by March 29, but the deadline has now been extended to May 3, 2024. Members who met the March 29 deadline will still see the \$600 payment in their checks on April 24 or May 2.

2024 Raise: All PS&T members received a 3% increase to their base salary, effective March 28, 2024, for those on the Administration payroll and April 4, 2024, for the Institution payroll.

Performance Awards: Those eligible will see these payments this month (April 2024). 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. Members on the Institution Payroll will receive their performance award on April 18, 2024. Those on the Administration Payroll will be paid April 24, 2024.

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.

Hazardous Duty Pay: For titles receiving hazardous duty pay, the pay rate increased to \$1 per hour effective April 2, 2024, up from 90 cents per hour in April 2023.



\$600

Higher Education Differential deadline extended

By **KATE STICKLES**

The Office of Employee Relations has extended the deadline for PEF members to submit proof of education degree or license to May 3, 2024.

The payment date of the \$600 for anyone who has already submitted proof has not changed. Anyone who met the previous March 29 deadline will see payment on April 24 (Administration Payroll) or May 2 (Institution Payroll). The Office of the State Comptroller will issue an updated payroll bulletin reflecting changes in processing the payment for credentials received after March 29.

As a reminder — the Higher Education Differential is a new benefit that PEF negotiated in the 2023-2026 PS&T Contract. Any member with an Associate’s degree or higher, or anyone who has a license issued by the New York State Education Department, qualifies for the \$600 payment, which is intended to reflect the unique professional nature of the titles PEF members hold in State service. The \$600 will be paid this year and again in 2025. Proof is being collected by agency HR or personnel offices, so contact them with any questions. 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

The educational institution also 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, and with the Governor’s Office,” said PEF Director of Contract Administration Debra 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,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “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.”

On a PEF Telephone Town Hall on Feb. 29, 2024, President Spence said he was going through the process himself.

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



PEF gears up for Wellness Fair and book giveaway

By **KATE STICKLES**

Health and wellness resources? 20,000 free books? What more could you ask for?!

There will be all that and more at the second annual PEF Community Wellness Fair and Reading Opens the World Book Giveaway, returning to the Washington Avenue Armory from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on April 27.

"The event is very special in that it helps to solidify our commitment to serve all New Yorkers on and off the job," said Stephanie McLean-Beathley, administrator for the PEF Membership Benefits Program. "PEF members work in communities across New York State, and this is just one way we can support members and local communities alike."

The PEF Membership Benefits Program, in partnership with PEF, is spearheading the event aimed at promoting health awareness and a healthy lifestyle by bringing the local community together with PEF, its members, and the vendors who have the resources to foster a healthier you.

"Our 2023 vendors were extremely pleased with the turnout, the location, and the opportunity to connect with the community," McLean-Beathley said.

Last year, all 20,000 books provided by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) were gone by the end of the day. Kids and adults of all ages browsed the titles, broken into reading levels. Families could take away up to 10 books and area educators up to 40. Some carried armloads, others brought along wagons.

"Families found the atmosphere very welcoming for children who attended, and everyone present took great delight from the expressions of joy on the children's faces as they selected their free books," McLean-Beathley said.

PEF is ready to go full speed ahead on the venture.

"We hope to continue to grow this community event," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "Those who enter public service care about their fellow New Yorkers, and this is a great way to continue to support them outside the workplace."



Members at OTDA helping create healthy eating, exercise habits for low-income New Yorkers

By KATE STICKLES

March was National Nutrition Month and PEF members at the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are pulling out all the stops to educate low-income New Yorkers about how to live healthier lives.

Elida Esposito, a PEF member for more than 13 years and a bureau chief in the SNAP program at OTDA, said SNAP is the nation's first line of defense to combat hunger and food insecurity.

Her job helps keep that program running.

"We supervise local social services' administration of SNAP," she said. "I also oversee and coordinate the [SNAP Education and Obesity Prevention \(SNAP-Ed\)](#) and SNAP Outreach contracts that deliver services to the SNAP population across New York state. Collectively, these programs bring in approximately \$41 million in federal dollars and \$12.5 million in state and local dollars annually."

As obesity continues to plague the country and low-income New Yorkers struggle to incorporate healthy eating into their lives, PEF members at OTDA are actively working to address these issues and more through the SNAP-Ed program.

Free to all who qualify for and/or receive SNAP benefits, SNAP-Ed "provides skill-based nutrition education classes and sponsors obesity prevention events in local communities on a variety of topics like healthy eating on a budget, smart shopping for vegetables and fruit, healthy meal planning, basic cooking and food safety skills, weight control, and physical activity," said Esposito.

"The goals are to encourage New Yorkers to eat more fruits and vegetables; drink less sugar-sweetened beverages; and exercise more and balance calories as part of a healthy lifestyle," she said.

SNAP-Ed is coordinated by OTDA and administered by a network of state and local providers, including Cornell Cooperative Extension, the state Department of Health, Office for the Aging, Department of Agriculture and Markets, the Food Bank of New York City, New York Common Pantry, the Children's Aid Society, and City Harvest, to name a few.

"In 2023, SNAP-Ed served more than 150,000 individuals," Esposito said. "Our program's success is a direct result of the collaborative partnerships we have developed with our implementing agencies and state partners over the years, and we cannot thank them enough for their continued efforts to support OTDA in serving the most vulnerable New Yorkers."



For National Nutrition Month, OTDA helped promote a [Facebook Live series](#) every Tuesday where partner agencies offered education on everything from meal planning with leftovers, to adding plant-based proteins and eating with the environment in mind, to tips on budgeting.

"National Nutrition Month is an exciting time for SNAP-Ed provider agencies," Esposito said. "Each year, they plan and implement a variety of services that are delivered in-person and virtually. This year's theme was Beyond the Table and many activities are centered around that."

Nutrition may be featured in March, but it is a priority year-round.

"The SNAP-Ed program reach is impressive, with services for children as young as five, all the way through older adulthood," Esposito said. "The combined methods of education surrounding healthy eating on a limited budget with physical activity play a critical role in advancing food and nutrition security and can have lifelong impacts."

For more information on SNAP-Ed, visit the [OTDA website](#) or [SNAP-Ed New York – Save time. Save money. Eat healthy.](#)

Editor's Note: PEF is doing its part to encourage a healthy lifestyle and make New Yorkers in the capital region aware of resources available to them and their families. The union and PEF Membership Benefits will hold their second annual Wellness Fair & Reading Opens the World Book Giveaway on April 27, 2024, at the Albany Armory on Washington Ave., from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. [Please click here for more information.](#)



PEF growing membership in 2024

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF is always focused on building a strong and robust membership, but since the Supreme Court's 2018 decision in *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)* — which ruled that workers employed by a government entity do not have to pay union dues in order to work a public service job — the union has made it a top priority.

In 2022, PEF led among public-sector locals across the country who participated in SEIU's "Together We Rise" initiative. Now, only a few months into 2024, PEF is once again near the top of the SEIU local pack, with 1,601 new members joining the union's ranks as of March 21, 2024.

"At 32% of our annual new member sign-up goal (5,000 in 2024), we are definitely ahead for the year," said Director of Organizing Scott Harms. "The Organizing Department continues to identify areas that need additional assistance in signing up new members so that we can keep these numbers strong and reach our goals for 2024."

As of February 2024, there are nearly 51,500 dues-paying members of PEF.



Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire forever a part of American labor history

By NAJEE WALKER

March 25 marks the 113th anniversary of one of the deadliest industrial disasters in American history. On this day in 1911, 146 garment workers lost their lives in a massive fire at the factory where they worked for the Triangle Shirtwaist Company.

The factory produced women's blouses and was owned by Max Blanck and Isaac Harris. There were about 500 workers employed there, mostly immigrant women and girls as young as 14-years-old. These workers earned as low as \$7 a week, with some paid up to \$15 a week; that's roughly \$215-460 a week in today's dollars.

The doors and exits to the factory were commonly locked to prevent workers from taking unauthorized breaks and reduce theft. On the day of the fire, many workers jumped from the 10th floor windows in an attempt to save themselves. It only took 18 minutes for firefighters to get the blaze under control, but by that time 146 workers died.

The silver lining of this horrendous tragedy was the immediate actions taken to prevent something like it from ever from happening again.

New York City established the American Society of Safety Professionals, which is now a global organization that works with federal agencies like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The state introduced legislation to create the Factory Investigating Commission, which toured New York's factories to report on measures the state could take to prevent future deaths by fire and unsafe or unclean environments. In



Photo of Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire at the Asch Building in New York City, 1911.

addition to about 60 other laws, the Sullivan-Hoey Fire Prevention Law was passed, which required factory owners to install sprinkler systems.

Equally as important, the fire spurred the growth of the labor movement in the U.S. Following the fire, a prominent labor leader, Rose Schneiderman, delivered an address to the Women's Trade Union League in New York. Her speech was harsh, not only to the officials, politicians, and employers, but to her fellow union members.



Garment worker, member of Women's Trade Union League and Labor Leader Rose Schneiderman, ca. 1900.

"I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement," Schneiderman said at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1911.

The membership ranks and political influence of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) expanded after the fire. The ILGWU was known in New York and throughout the country for having close relationships to political officials, including New York Governor Alfred E. Smith and Senator Robert F. Wagner—who later had a hand in crafting U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

Today, the legacy of the ILGWU, and of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, is represented by UNITE HERE, a labor union that covers members from the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE)—formerly ILGWU—and members from the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE).

PEF Membership Benefits hosts children's book signing with local author

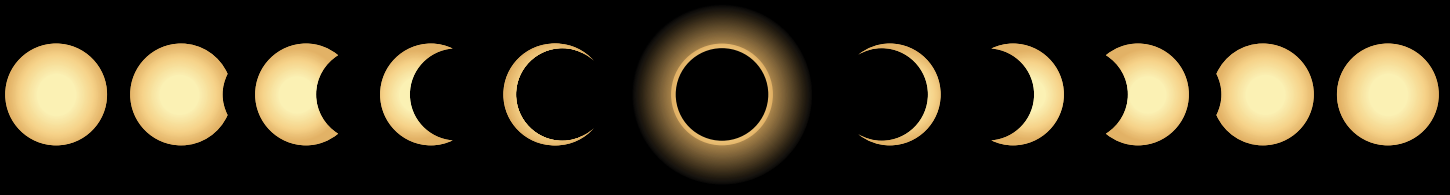
PEF Membership Benefits organized a book signing at the Howe Branch of the Albany Public Library on March 16. Dozens of kids and their caregivers attended, talking to author Teryn Roberts about her book, "I Deserve Better!", which she wrote to help kids deal with the difficult emotions they feel when disappointed by parents.

Roberts is a cousin of PEF Retiree and former PEF Trustee Maddie Shannon-Roberts. "I Deserve Better!" tells the story of a young boy who receives a call from his father saying he is coming to pick him up – only to be disappointed when dad doesn't show. 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.

Note: PEF will host its second annual Community Wellness Fair & Reading Opens the World Book Giveaway on April 27 at the Albany Armory from 9 a.m. — 3 p.m. [Please click here for more details.](#)





PEF members mobilize to make eclipse viewing safe and instructive

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF members at numerous state agencies are working hard behind the scenes in anticipation of crowds flocking to western and northern New York on April 8 to catch a glimpse of the rare total solar eclipse that will follow a roughly 100-mile-wide path across the state.

Cities and towns within the path of totality include Jamestown, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Watertown, Old Forge, Lake Placid and Plattsburgh. The entire event will last for up to 2.5 hours, marking the time the sun is first obstructed to the last moments when the moon's shadow is cast.

State parks

The Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation created a [website](#) to guide visitors to parks offering activities and viewing opportunities, including Allegany State Park, Selkirk Shores State Park, Ganondagan State Historic Site, John Brown Farm State Historic Site, and Wellesley Island State Park.

At [Niagara Falls State Park](#), there will be programming led by scientists, subject-matter experts, and even astronauts from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The evening of April 8 there will be fireworks and shops will offer commemorative eclipse merchandise.

[Ganondagan](#) will offer short presentations leading up to totality, including past eclipses in the context of Haudenosaunee history and the science behind total solar eclipses. Programs after totality include Native American storytelling and a discussion of the shared experience of witnessing totality.

Road safety

The state Department of Transportation is advising visitors and residents to plan ahead for dense traffic and long backups on public roadways. The agency has put out social media posts urging everyone to use the 511NY service, to come prepared with food, water, and medications, and not to park on the side of roads.

For those who must drive, the Department of Motor Vehicles has additional advice: If you're driving during the eclipse, be prepared

to experience sudden darkness, and do not try to look at the eclipse while you're in motion. Find a place to park if you want to look, and make sure you have proper eyewear.

Eye safety

ISO-certified eclipse glasses will shield your eyes from serious and possibly permanent damage, which can occur by looking at the eclipse with regular sunglasses or without any eye protection, according to the state Department of Health.

A limited quantity of I LOVE NY [eclipse glasses](#) will be available at locations throughout the state, including New York State Welcome Centers and select service areas along the New York State Thruway. Glasses will be limited to two pairs per person, while supplies last, with a limited amount distributed daily.

What is an eclipse?

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun at just the right time and orientation, with the moon casting a shadow on a portion of the Earth's surface. On rare occasions, the moon entirely blocks the face of the sun and results in a total solar eclipse.

"Places in the path of totality, including most of Western and North Central New York, will experience several minutes of darkened sky similar to the twilight seen before sunrise or after sunset," according to the National Weather Service in Buffalo. "If we have clear skies on the day of the eclipse, an incredible view of the sun's corona will be seen during the few minutes of totality. The sun's corona is normally not visible, except during a total solar eclipse. The corona is wispy, white streamers of plasma (charged gas) that radiate out from the surface of the sun."

I Love NY launched a [website](#) full of information on times, locations, events, and more.

We want to hear from you

Was your agency involved in eclipse preparation or activities? Tell us about it! Email us at Communicator@pef.org.



Blast from the Past: PEF's lobbying, organizing helps stave off planned layoffs at DOL

By **KATE STICKLES**

In 1987, hundreds of state Department of Labor (DOL) members faced layoffs. They were initially spared by a reprieve, but layoffs were back on the table and slated for March.

PEF leadership and rank-and-file members mobilized immediately. The union organized what observers said was the largest public demonstration in Albany by a single labor union, sending a strong message to legislators and the state that layoffs would have a devastating impact on DOL services.

It worked.

An unprecedented second layoff reprieve was announced only two days after PEF rallied together more than 1,000 PEF members and descended on the State Capitol to protest the budget cuts that necessitated layoff plans.

Responding to PEF's unerring lobbying and grassroots support, state legislators passed a bill allocating about \$3 million to keep DOL jobs intact until federal money was received. PEF took the fight to Washington to muster support for a measure restoring millions of dollars in federal aid to DOL – if approved, the money would cancel the third planned layoff of several hundred workers.

Unions are well known for strikes, lobbying, and rallies to protect workers' rights. PEF rallied recently at SUNY Downstate to oppose the Chancellor's "transformation" plan for the hospital, which would uproot all PEF members at the facility and move them to Kings County Hospital across the street and would decimate the United University Professions' ranks. PEF members lobbied for much-needed changes to social worker compensation last month. The union's Executive Board circled Empire State Plaza to call attention to bullying and toxic work environments at state agencies at the end of last year.

When PEF members face adversity in the workplace, whether it's layoffs or bullying, PEF stands up, stands strong, and fights back.



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Lobbying & Legwork

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

By Ronald Kermami
Editor

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

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

public demonstration in Albany by a single labor union.

More than 1,000 PEF members from

Cuomo Vetos Labor Bill See Page 4

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

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

Responding to PEF's incessant lobbying and grass-roots support, state lawmakers passed a bill allocating about \$3 million to keep Labor Department jobs intact until federal money is received.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Continued on Page 8)

Albany Rally

(Continued from Page 1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



PEF member and nurse Joan Rosegreen, second from left, volunteering in Jamaica with the JAHJAH Foundation in January 2024.

PEF nurse donates time and expertise abroad

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Many PEF members live their union values by volunteering as a force for good in their communities. For Joan Rosegreen, a PEF member for 19 years, that work stretches far beyond America's border.

"I have always been involved in giving back to the community," said Rosegreen, a Registered Nurse 2 in the Teaching and Research Center at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. "My first profession was teaching. I taught for three years after graduating college."

Rosegreen has worked at Downstate for 21 years and been a nurse for 29. In addition to being a PEF steward and a Council Leader with PEF Division 198, Rosegreen volunteers with Jamaicans Abroad Helping Jamaicans At Home (JAHJAH). The foundation travels to the Caribbean annually to help deliver healthcare to underserved communities. She also volunteers with Rotary Club International.

This year, Rosegreen traveled to her home country of Jamaica for one week on a medical mission as leader of a triage team.

"Our mission involves going to hospitals and schools in the community where dental care, gynecology, and physicals are performed," Rosegreen said. "We also conduct a community health fair annually."

In addition to conducting and directing care for patients without medical insurance, the team diagnoses health conditions and sends patients to local hospitals for treatment when necessary. This year, Rosegreen said that several hundred patients arrived for tooth extractions.

Medical students from the area also attend these missions as part of their education. This year, Rosegreen instructed students on how to diagnose patients using ultrasound.

"The overall goal is to promote health and dental hygiene," Rosegreen said. "All of the services we provide are totally free."

Though Rosegreen has always been focused on community, she recalls the moment she knew that volunteering was for her.

"I was in the emergency room when a doctor came in with his mother-in-law. He was not satisfied with some of the unprofessionalism he saw in the room," she said. "I asked him how I could assist him and his mother. He said he was so impressed with my professionalism; he had his mother transferred to my care."

Years later, at an awards ceremony, she met the doctor again, he told her about his work as a volunteer, and "the rest is history," Rosegreen said.

Rosegreen received the Angel Award from JAHJAH in 2022. She was recognized for being one of the first volunteers for a special COVID-19 response mission in Jamaica when the country was experiencing an overwhelming number of cases. She was also honored for her contributions to the community and recruitment of more members to JAHJAH.

Later this year, as part of her work with Rotary Club International, Rosegreen will travel to Singapore to deliver healthcare to communities there.





Region 3 hosts New York legislators from the Finger Lakes region at annual breakfast

PEF Region 3 welcomed nearly a dozen State lawmakers to the regional office in Rochester on March 16 for a Legislative Breakfast. About 90 PEF members from a dozen State agencies attended to hear from Senators and Assemblymembers. The annual tradition is a chance for lawmakers to speak directly with PEF members, elected PEF leaders and the Region 3 Political Action Committee. PEF budget priorities are discussed, which this year include amending Tier 6 of the State pension plan in order to better attract and retain employees, as well as defining workplace bullying so that managers

and staff can be trained to recognize it and put a stop to it. PEF thanks the following lawmakers for attending: Assemblymembers Harry Bronson, Marjorie Byrnes, Jeff Gallahan, Josh Jensen, Jen Lunsford, Brian Manktelow, and Demond Meeks, as well as State Senators Samra Brouk, Jeremy Cooney, and Pam Helming.

If you haven't written your local lawmakers yet about PEF's budget priorities, please [visit this page and do it this week!](#)



Why a Defined Benefit Pension is so important!

Happy Spring, PEF members and retirees! I'm sharing the below article on retirement insecurity with you during this year's budget negotiations because it emphasizes the importance of a defined benefit pension and our need in New York State to fix Tier 6.

Retirement Insecurity 2024: Americans' Views of Retirement

By the National Institute on Retirement Security

A national opinion poll finds that working age Americans are increasingly worried about retirement, and they see a return to pensions as a way to restore the American Dream of retirement. Eighty-three percent of respondents say that all workers should have a pension so they can be independent and self-reliant in retirement, and more than three-fourths of Americans agree that those with pensions are more likely to have a secure retirement.

The survey results are detailed in Retirement Insecurity 2024: Americans' Views of Retirement conducted by Greenwald Research.

When asked if the nation faces a retirement crisis, 79% of Americans agree there indeed is a retirement crisis, up from 67% in 2020. More than half of Americans (55%) are concerned that they cannot achieve financial security in retirement. Regarding Social Security, nearly all Americans (87%) agree Congress should act now to shore up funding rather than waiting ten years to enact a solution. Ninety percent say it should be a priority for the next president and Congress to tackle Social Security's funding shortfall.

The report's key findings are as follows:

- Americans express strong support for pensions. More than three-fourths of Americans have a favorable view of pensions, while 77% agree that the disappearance of pensions makes it harder to achieve the American Dream. Eighty-three percent of Americans say that all workers should have a pension so they can be independent and self-reliant in retirement.
- High retirement anxiety continues among Americans. When asked if the nation faces a retirement crisis, 79% of Americans agree there indeed is a retirement crisis, up from 67% in 2020. More than half of Americans (55%) are concerned that they cannot achieve financial security in retirement. When it comes to inflation, 73% of respondents said recent inflation has them more concerned about retirement.



- Americans want policy leaders to give their retirement concerns a higher priority. The vast majority of Americans (87%) say leaders in Washington don't understand how hard it is for workers to save for retirement, up from 76% in 2020. Also, 86% say Washington leaders need to focus more on retirement and give it a higher priority on the policy agenda, again up from 2020 (76%). Most Americans (84%) say government should make it easier to offer pensions to their workers, up from 76% in 2020.
- Americans want action now to safeguard Social Security. Eighty-seven percent of Americans say Congress should act now to shore up funding rather than waiting another ten years to find a solution. Also, 87% say the program must remain a priority no matter the state of federal budget deficits. When it comes to expanding Social Security, slightly more than half of Americans (52%) agree with this concept.

Americans are worried about long-term care costs in retirement. Eighty-seven percent are concerned generally about rising costs, while 80% are worried about the rising cost of long-term nursing care. A large share of Americans (66%) are worried about rising healthcare costs in retirement, 75% are concerned about rising housing costs in retirement, and 66% are worried about increasing costs to get help with everyday chores like cleaning and cooking.





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.

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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.

Cassandra Bradford is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse.

Kevin Bromley is a registered nurse 1 with the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities in Norwood.

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.

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.

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 23, 2024

When Western New York Area Labor Federation President Peter De Jesús Jr. put out a call for support, PEF members in western New York answered it. New York's Medicaid reimbursement rates only cover about 70% of a provider's costs, which has left the region's hospitals struggling to provide \$256 million in uncompensated care, and nursing homes collapsing under a \$1.6 billion Medicaid gap. For workers and their communities this has resulted in severe staffing shortages, fewer open beds, life-threatening distances to travel for care, and closed facilities. Operating deficits have sapped bargaining power over wages and benefits, which has exacerbated already dire recruitment and retention rates. On March 22, PEF members joined their union siblings from 1199SEIU, CWA, NYSNA, and CSEA for a Medicaid Equity march and rally in downtown Buffalo.



March 15, 2024

Region 5 members attended the Binghamton Black Bears hockey game. Union members showed off their union strong swag and a great time was had by all!



March 22, 2024

Another group of PEF members completed their OSHA-30 training in the NYC office, thanks to trainers from American Federation of Teachers. The training focused on how to keep and maintain a safe workplace, while also knowing what to look for and how to report unsafe conditions. They're ready to advocate for health and safety in their workplaces!

March 19, 2024

Thanks to the members of PEF Division 283 at Rochester Psychiatric Center, who stopped by for the membership meeting to hear about contract money hitting their paychecks this Spring!





March 9, 2024

PEF Region 6 celebrated the retirement of Michael F. Geraghty, Jr., at the leadership conference. Region 6 members are beyond grateful for Mike's years of service to the union and wishes him all the best in his next chapter!

March 22, 2024

PEF members at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo turned out for a membership meeting, hearing from their Council Leader Bruce Jagroop, PEF VP Randi DiAntonio, and PEF Membership Benefits Program Administrator Stephanie McLean-Beathley.





March 16, 2024

Region 3 hosted their Annual Legislative Breakfast and invited Senator Pam Helming, Assemblymember Harry Bronson and Assemblymember Demond Meeks. Alongside the members, the legislators discussed the state budget, recruitment and retention and plans to Fix Tier 6.



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

