

Vol. 42

The COMMUNICATOR

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STOP
BULLYING!
START RESPECTING!

REFORM
TIER
SIX!

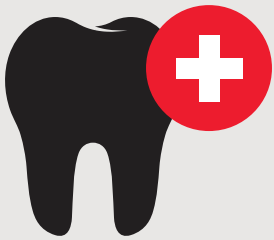
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Year in Review

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BROOKLYN
NEEDS DOWNSTATE



FEAR
SHOULD NOT BE
A WORK EMOTION



Regulate
AI in
State
Agencies

SHORT
STAFFING
IS NO REASON
TO CLOSE
FACILITIES

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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



Union Strong in 2025!

Happy New Year, PEF members! I hope you all enjoyed quality time with loved ones over the holidays and have returned to your jobs with renewed spirits and the same commitment to public service that has always defined PEF members.

You are reading our combined December/January issue of *The Communicator*, which means the big story is [a look back on all we accomplished in 2024](#). Reading it, I'm amazed again at everything we did together – from saving SUNY Downstate, to further reforming Tier 6, to leading the way on calling out toxic workplaces and advocating for transparency and regulation regarding the State's use of Artificial Intelligence.

In addition, in case you missed it, I was joined by my fellow Statewide Officers for an all-member Telephone Town Hall on Dec. 19, and a [recording is available](#). We spent some time reviewing union accomplishments and looking ahead to contractual gains that will pay off in 2025, including a change to the way performance awards are calculated. I will continue holding Town Halls this year, as it has proven to be an effective way to communicate with thousands of you at a time.

We are already more than a week into the new year. There is a "Groundhog Day" element to some of our union work, so with a nod to that Bill Murray classic, I encourage you to tune in to Governor Kathy Hochul's State of the State address on January 14 at 1 p.m. It will be livestreamed on the [Governor's website](#). The Executive Budget she releases timed to that speech will be thoroughly analyzed by the PEF Legislative Department and inform our advocacy and campaigns in the year ahead.

I expect PEF members to once again be loud and proud about the things we support and what we think is not in the best interest of public employees. Please keep reading *The Communicator*, stay plugged in to our [website](#) and our social media channels ([Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#)), and check your personal email for the very latest union news and activities all year long.

Finally, some words that were suggested to me at our last Executive Board by Amy Pacholk, the Division Council leader at SUNY Stony Brook and co-chair of the Statewide Nurses Committee: "The first wealth is health. A healthy tomorrow begins with the steps we take today. Your four-hour cancer screening benefit renewed on January 1. I encourage you to take advantage of this important benefit to prioritize your well-being. Let's continue to care for ourselves and each other!"

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wayne Spence
PEF President



A look back on a busy year for PEF

2024 was a busy one for PEF – from the fight to save SUNY Downstate, to financial wins for members amounting to thousands of dollars, to title reallocations and contractual pay increases, and so much more. As we move forward together into 2025, let’s take a look back.

PEF hit the ground running on legislative plans. After Gov. Kathy Hochul released her Executive Budget proposal, PEF’s Legislative Department, working in cooperation with the Statewide Political Action Committee, immediately began preparations to advocate for and against the parts of the budget important to PEF members.

“Everyone knows the state is grossly understaffed and underpaid,” [said President Wayne Spence at the time](#). “Some of our priorities address those issues, like reforming the Tier 6 pension plan and fighting bullying in the workplace. We are asking members to support us by sending letters and participating in campaigns.”

Many of the letter-writing campaigns would help bills become laws toward the close of 2024.

Meanwhile, the union was already making calls and attending hearings to make sure that PEF members had a voice during the legislative session to come.

Vice President Randi DiAntonio attended a hearing on Workforce Development and Labor issues on January 30, 2024. [Her testimony](#) highlighted the issues agencies are still having with recruitment and retention, as well as offered solutions to those issues.

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

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

PEF also spent time with the New York State Department of Civil Service, attending a hearing on January 18 that discussed the expansion of the NY HELPS program. HELPS (Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide), which launched in April 2023, waives Civil Service exams for certain titles. PEF’s urged caution at the hearing, advising that the state not rely on a temporary fix to address major long-term staffing issues.

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



State correctional facilities on the chopping block

Members rallied against Governor Hochul's budget proposal asking the legislature to permit closing up to five New York State correctional facilities with just 90-days' notice. The previous statute required 12 months' notice.

[At a rally held at the State Capitol](#) on Jan. 31, 2024, organized by Assemblyman Chris Tague, PEF Vice President DiAntonio spoke against fast-tracking any closures.

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

In August 2024, [PEF rallied with fellow unions](#) in Fort Ann, N.Y., near Great Meadow Correctional Facility (CF), one of two facilities the governor proposed to close. PEF Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger and Vice President Bruce Giddings were among those assembled.

In the end, Great Meadow and Sullivan CF were closed in November, but PEF was able to hold the state to its no layoffs pledge and all members who wished to continue state service were transferred to another facility or a similar job with the state.

Fighting to save SUNY Downstate ... again



BROOKLYN NEEDS DOWNSTATE

"Brooklyn Needs Downstate" includes PEF, UUP, NYSUT, NYSNA and a handful of other unions, as well as influential clergy from the surrounding communities, and its mission is simple – to make the case that SUNY Downstate does not need to be closed or downsized, but funded and lifted up so it can continue to deliver quality healthcare in Brooklyn.

The coalition organized community meetings, marches, and ran an advertising campaign on location television, in the subways, and via mobile billboards – all pointing out the folly of transitioning services from Downstate to Kings County Hospital across the street.

[A crowd of about 1,200 hospital workers](#), community members, elected officials, and union activists gathered on Clarkson Avenue on a chilly day in late February, just outside the entrance to Downstate Medical Center in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, demanding that SUNY and Governor Hochul reconsider the plan.

SHORT STAFFING IS NO REASON TO CLOSE FACILITIES

"The MRI was invented right here at Downstate," President 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.

In June 2024, the Governor relented to the coalition's demands, providing \$400 million in the state budget to keep the hospital operating and forming an advisory panel to consider the future of Downstate. PEF will play a leading role in that effort moving forward and plans to keep the pressure on SUNY and the Governor in 2025.

Fix Tier 6!

Meantime, PEF also joined other unions from across the state to deliver a familiar rallying cry: Fix Tier 6!

After more than a decade, Tier 6 of the state's pension plan still needs to be changed so that New Yorkers are attracted to state service and want to stay employed with the state. In 2022, PEF and other unions successfully advocated to change the vesting period from 10 years to five years. Last year, PEF and various other unions that make up the NYS AFL-CIO lobbied hard to change the final average salary calculation from 5 years to 3, as well as extend the exclusion of overtime earnings when calculating members' contributions to the pension plan until March 31, 2026.

[Union members and legislators took to the steps of the Million Dollar Staircase](#) inside the Capitol Building in Albany on March 5 to rally alongside one another and send the message that Tier 6 is not working, is not retaining employees, and makes it harder for the state to attract more workers.

"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," PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe 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."

REFORM
TIER
SIX!

Tackling toxic work environments

STOP BULLYING! START RESPECTING!

PEF first made news on this topic in [September 2023](#) when members of the Executive Board marched around Empire State Plaza in Albany calling attention to the problem of workplace bullying.

Last year, PEF responded to the requests of members and regional leaders and fought back against bullying at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn. The consensus among staff at Kingsboro was 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, who was instrumental in [organizing a rally on May 1 outside the facility](#). "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."

Rare total solar eclipse

A major celestial event on April 8 which passed over much of New York state captured not only the attention of the state, the country and the world, but also of many PEF members who had a hand in making sure the people of New York could view the event and travel safely.

PEF members at numerous state agencies worked hard behind the scenes in anticipation of crowds flocking to western and northern New York to catch a glimpse of the total solar eclipse that followed a roughly 100-mile-wide path across the state. Cities and towns within the path of totality included Jamestown, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Watertown, Old Forge, Lake Placid and Plattsburgh.

In 2020, [members at New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation \(Parks\)](#) in the Niagara Falls region cast their eyes four years into the future in anticipation of the eclipse, which they compared 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?"

Workplace Violence in Buffalo

Also in April, Buffalo Psychiatric Center (BPC) experienced a terrible act of violence that saw [three staff members stabbed](#) by a patient. The patient was able to walk into a residence with multiple knives.

"He had a knife in each hand, and he started wielding his fists, stabbing people," said PEF Region 1 Coordinator Michele Iorfida. "Then he turned and walked out. He sat on the curb. He could have gone in the next building, where there is only one unarmed guard. They are allowed to walk in that building with anything."

President Spence took the earliest flight to Buffalo when he heard the news.

"They have a long recovery ahead of them," said President Spence, who met with the victims, families, and members of PEF Division 180 at the BPC.

PEF immediately began advocating for more safety measures at the BPC and other facilities and will mount a Stop Workplace Violence campaign in 2025.

Nurses take center stage

Every May is National Nurses Month and [PEF's Nurse Lobby Day](#) helped yield results in the fight to keep SUNY Downstate open, advocate support for Tier 6 reform and more.

Perhaps one of the biggest pieces of advocacy highlighted during nurses' month was the rejection of the Interstate Nurses Compact, which PEF successfully helped block.

"New York maintains higher licensure standards than most of the states in the compact and, as a union representing more than 10,000 nurses, PEF opposed watering down standards for New York's health care professionals," President Spence said.

'Brooklyn Needs Downstate' goes federal

Nearly five months after PEF and UUP learned about the plan to effectively close SUNY Downstate, President Spence and UUP President Fred Kowal found themselves in the Rayburn House Office Building on June 5 thanking [U.S. Rep. Yvette Clarke](#) for her help saving SUNY Downstate and securing a commitment from her that the critical healthcare hub in her Brooklyn home district will not be neglected.

"We're here along with PEF and UUP because the fight to save SUNY Downstate continues," said Bishop Orlando Findlayter, who serves as a pastor at New Hope Christian Fellowship in Brooklyn. "We had a fruitful meeting with Congresswoman Clarke and we are committed to doing what we do – street engagement, community engagement, informing members of the community that SUNY is open, and they should come for services. We're also providing some level of comfort to the employees – don't abandon ship – because you are needed by this community."



PEF notches legislative wins

As soon as the state Legislative session ended on June 6, 2024, PEF began working with members to keep the pressure on Governor Hochul to sign critical bills into law to address issues like bullying, disability and the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI).

More than 800 bills were sent to the Governor, and [the union succeeded in securing quite a few priorities](#) including a version of the AI bill that will make the state disclose how it is using the technology, a law that puts the onus on DOCCS to find workable solutions to heat problems in their facilities, and the addition of work-related stress injuries to the Workers' Compensation law.

"Thanks to the leadership and support of the New York State Senate and Assembly Majorities, led by Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie as well as key partners like the NYS AFL-CIO, our members and other coalition partners, PEF successfully leveraged the 'Fund Our Future' campaign to build upon our achievements in the 2024 state budget," said President Spence.

Answering the call for members in need

On July 16, storms ravaged upstate, central and western New York communities, including Rome, N.Y., which saw devastating tornadoes touch down in the city and surrounding areas.

Region 6 Coordinator Christopher Dunham and PEF [swiftly kicked into recovery mode after the tornado](#). While the PEF Disaster Relief Fund worked to collect money to help impacted members, Dunham used Region 6 funds to purchase grocery and gas cards to distribute to members immediately.

Leading the way on AI



In July, PEF organized the first ["Summit on Artificial Intelligence"](#). Legislators, the commissioner of the state Department of Civil Service, and leaders from the Office of

Information Technology Services came together in Albany to discuss how the state should approach its use of AI to make sure it doesn't run rampant and do more harm than good.

"We are connecting all these people together to start a conversation," said PEF Statewide IT Committee Chair Radhakrishna Mohan, who is a PEF Trustee. "AI is already here. How are we going to catch up with that? How are we going to tackle this and how it will affect our jobs?"

New union leaders take office

On August 3, 2024, old and new PEF leadership were ceremonially sworn in at an [event attended by Governor Hochul and Attorney General Letitia James, and emceed by NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento](#).

President Spence won an historic fourth term, joined by returning Vice



Presidents Randi DiAntonio and Darlene Williams, as well as new VP Bruce Giddings. A few new Regional Coordinators also joined the [leadership](#) ranks.

PEF members found time in late August to visit the [State Fair in Syracuse](#), where member volunteers and staff spent time at the PEF booth getting to know people from across the state, and rekindling relationships with retirees and former PEF members.

Across the fairgrounds, PEF members from almost all state agencies staffed booths — from the Department of Transportation to the Office of Cannabis Management and the Workers' Compensation Board. Fairgoers were provided information about what state workers and PEF members do for them, and how they themselves could become part of a strong workforce backed by unions.

[The annual PEF Convention](#) welcomed delegates from across the state to Syracuse in mid-September to conduct the business of the union. They congratulated President Spence on winning a fourth term and he encouraged them to continue their strong advocacy on behalf of PEF's priorities.

More workplace violence

While at Convention, the president received word about [a brutal assault that left a PEF member from South Beach Psychiatric Center on a ventilator in a Staten Island hospital](#).

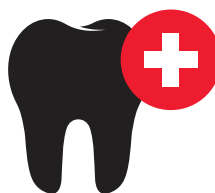
PEF leaders and staff mobilized to assist and support members at the facility and engaged with management and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to address security issues.

On September 17, the PEF nurse was hit in the side of the head by a patient, knocking him to the ground. He was rushed to the hospital with multiple brain bleeds.

"I saw the video of Peter get hit on the side of his face," said VP Williams. "He fell so hard. On September 17, he left for work, probably said goodbye to his family, but he's not going to come home that same person. He will never go home the way he was when he left."

As mentioned, PEF is mounting a Stop Workplace Violence campaign in 2025 aimed at educating members about what to do in the event of an attack, as well as advocating for policy changes to protect state workers in dangerous settings.

New dental provider



As part of PEF's last contract negotiation, New York state had to pay an annual \$400 stipend to every member until it secured a new dental provider. Thanks in part to that financial pressure, the state approved Anthem Blue Cross to administer the NYSHIP dental plan as of October 1.

Feedback has been mixed, but the contract does contain mechanisms that will allow the state to hold Anthem accountable if they do not deliver according to the contract's terms.

Salary increases for some

Rounding out the year, PEF celebrated a couple wins that put more money in some members' pockets. [More than 2,100 state employees in professional traineeships at 46 state agencies, many of whom are PEF members, received pay increases of either 5.7% or 11.6%](#), depending on their title. The increases will raise the salary of those in Trainee 1 titles from Grade 13 to Grade 14, and those in Trainee 2 titles from Grade 14 to Grade 16.



Additionally, the Governor announced that [several engineering titles across the state were approved for pay increases](#). The agencies with the highest number of affected employees include the Department of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Department of Health and the Office of General Services. The increases come in the form of geographic pay differentials (geos) and an increased hiring rate (IHR).

“We commend Governor Hochul for her commitment to investing in the State workforce to recruit and retain top talent,” said President Spence. “The PEF members impacted by these pay increases are highly skilled public servants who play critical roles protecting and maintaining New York’s vital infrastructure. Offering compensation on par with the private sector is a positive move toward attracting talented professionals to state employment.”

Editor’s Note: Members can read any of the stories PEF published in 2024 by visiting [The Communicator archive](#). If you have a story in 2025, please reach out to us at Communicator@pef.org!



PEF's parent unions raising money for California workers, families

**UNITY,
SOLIDARITY,
AND COMING
TOGETHER.**

That's what unions are all about, and that's what our siblings in Southern California need right now as firefighters battle to contain active wildfires across the region, which have burned more than 40,000 acres and forced some 150,000 people to evacuate.

There will be many needs in the coming weeks, months and years as the people sift through the rubble and rebuild.

You can help by donating to the relief funds of [SEIU](#) and [AFT](#), both of which will use the money to directly assist union families impacted by the wildfires.



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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/>



PEF statewide leaders update membership on contract, legislative work, dental provider

Thousands of members tuned in as President Wayne Spence, along with Vice Presidents Randi DiAntonio, Bruce Giddings, and Darlene Williams, and select PEF staff, hosted a Telephone Town Hall December 19 to discuss the contract, ongoing legislative campaigns, the dental plan, and other topics of interest to members.

Please refer to the below timecodes and topics for information:

01:45: President Spence reported the union was in a strong financial position, with the addition of nearly 7,000 new members in 2024, and stated that Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue expects to present a balanced budget in March 2025.

03:00: VP Williams briefly updated listeners on plans for the the 2025 PEF Convention, to be held Oct. 19-22, 2025, in Lake Placid, and VP DiAntonio urged members to consider becoming a delegate. Information will be provided in a Spring 2025 edition of the Communicator.

05:30: VP Williams provided information on what members can expect in the next round of contract negotiations. Work is already underway to select the next negotiating team, which will begin training in the new year with hopes of returning to the bargaining table well before the current contract expires in April 2026.

06:20: Information was shared about longevities, or performance awards, and the contractual change to basing the awards on total years of service, including time in other bargaining units like CSEA. The award amounts: \$1,500 for anyone with 12 years of service; \$3,000 with 17 years of service; and \$4,500 with 22 years of service.

08:40: Director of Contract Administration Deb Greenberg explained “grandfathered in” members, explaining no one would lose out on awards if they received them under the previous eligibility guidelines.

10:15: VP Williams shared information on the Higher Education Differential payout of \$600 in April 2025 and noted that multiple degrees will not earn members multiple payments. Anyone who received the first differential payment this year will receive it again.



Talk to your HR or personnel office about how to prove eligibility if this will be your first time applying for the differential.

11:50: Discussion moved to location pay increases in April 2025 due to contract wins, with the Downstate adjustment going from \$3,400 to \$4,000 and the Midstate adjustment going from \$1,650 to \$2,000. PEF Civil Service Research/Enforcement Director Veronica Foley talked about the difference between location pay and geographic pay.

13:25: Deb Greenberg shared information about Dependent Care Advantage Accounts, tuition reimbursement, and the Productivity Enhancement Program (PEP). The deadline for 2025 DCAA and PEP has passed. Members should read The Communicator or check PEF.org/benefits for the very latest.

17:30: VP DiAntonio talked about the importance of political action and discussed some of PEF's wins from the 2024 legislative session, including Tier 6 pension reform, saving SUNY Downstate, eliminating lag payroll and salary deferral, stopping cuts to retiree health care, and other PEF priorities signed by the Governor, such as bills to allow work-related stress injuries as a result of on-the-job incidents in worker's compensation claims, addressing Department of Corrections and Community Service (DOCCS) facility temperatures, Civil Service exam availability, and more.

26:50: Information moved to goals and campaigns for 2025, including more Tier 6 reform, addressing workplace violence, creating penalties for assaulting public employees, as well as other issues important to members across many state agencies. Members are urged to get involved at the local level and should contact their PEF Regional Office for details.

29:50: VP Giddings discussed his work chairing the Labor/Management Advisory Council, as well as the Division meetings he has attended across his coverage area (Regions 6-8).

33:15: PEF CSE/R Director Veronica Foley talked about her department's goals for the coming year, which include a major focus on educating members about how to advocate for salary reallocations. President Spence spoke about how he represents all members, but must operate within the State's parameters – when one title gets upgraded, that means the process works and other titles will hopefully see increases in the future.

39:00: The president spoke about the State's new dental provider, Anthem, and some members' dissatisfaction with the plan. Director Greenberg discussed the penalties the dental contract imposes should Anthem fail to meet performance standards in each quarter.

42:35: Director of Membership Information Services Joe Cocci touched on PEF's plans to launch a mobile app in the first quarter of 2025, which will be a central place for members to learn everything they need to know about the union and its current activities.

Listen Now:



Report on privatization, austerity sheds light on problems in the mental healthcare sector

By **KATE STICKLES**

One of the cornerstones of PEF's Fund Our Future campaign is privatization and how it is detrimental to the public interest.

New York closed more than 2,000 state-operated inpatient mental health beds during the Cuomo administration, and as a result was woefully unprepared to deal with mental health needs during and after the COVID pandemic.

PEF partnered with researchers at the Worker Institute and the Buffalo Co-Lab at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) to conduct a study on the impact of austerity and privatization, focusing on the mental health sector.

Researchers investigated changes in the size of the mental health workforce; changes in the composition of that workforce; changes in the overall wages of workers in mental health-related industries; wage changes in those related industries relative to comparison industries; and wages by employer type (private sector vs. state government) for top occupations in related industries.

Key findings

While employment in key mental health-related industries—psychiatric hospitals and residential care facilities—is trending upward, all growth has been concentrated in the private sector. Between 1990 and 2021, the number of jobs in these industries increased almost seven times faster than job growth observed in New York State's economy, but the number of jobs in state government-owned mental health facilities has fallen precipitously over time.

"Public sector jobs in mental health industries have traditionally paid significantly higher wages than the same jobs in the private sector," said Anne Marie Brady, the Senior Extension Associate – Research Director, Worker Rights and Equity, at the ILR Worker Institute. "Unionization is presumably one of the key reasons for these wage disparities. As mental health work shifts more toward the private sector, mental health workers stand to see their purchasing power decrease."

The Cornell report found that in 2020 the median annual salary of a full-time worker in the mental health industry was more than \$1,700 greater in the public sector than the private. The wage differential was even higher for traditionally working-class occupations, like cleaning staff, secretaries, and aides.

The study concluded that policies adopted by the state slashed budgets, closed facilities and beds, and shifted resources from the state to the private sector. In 2021, PEF fought attempts to curtail services at Buffalo Children's Psychiatric hospital by 50% and to close the Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center. If it wasn't for the advocacy of unions like PEF saving critical institutions, even more mentally ill New Yorkers who need a higher level of care would be left walking the streets.

"Policy reforms have left New York's mental healthcare system reliant on private, non-profit providers of community-based care and general hospitals – both private non-profit and public safety net hospitals - with significantly reduced capacity for inpatient psychiatric care," Brady said.

The study also showed declining government employment opportunities have disproportionately affected women and workers of color.

"Crucially, the shrinking levels of state government employment in mental health-related industries do not appear to be race- and gender-neutral," Brady said. From 2000 to 2020, the largest drop in the MH-related state government workforce occurred among African American workers, with African American men experiencing the largest relative drop.

Mental healthcare capacity on the state government side has contracted considerably, Brady said.

"Just 20 of the state's 62 counties experienced increases in psychiatric care capacity, measured by the number of providers per 100,000 residents," she said. "Most counties (40 of 62) saw their capacity decrease. That contraction is a statewide phenomenon, though the heaviest losses are occurring downstate."

The diminished capacity has had negative impacts.

"The majority of counties (34 of 59) experienced increases in age-adjusted suicide rates over [roughly] the past decade," Brady said. "These findings reinforce the emerging picture that at least





one indicator of population-level mental health in New York State (suicide) has, on balance, been stagnant or worsening in the last decade.”

Brady said the bottom line is clear: “Trends toward privatization and state government austerity in the New York State mental health workforce are costing New Yorkers good paying union jobs, and the good jobs being lost have been disproportionately held by women and African Americans.

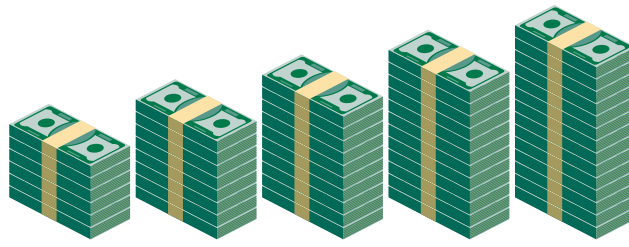
What will PEF do with the study results?

“With this research we will make a case to legislators that privatization is not good for anybody -- patients, their families, workers and communities,” said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio, who has worked for decades as a Licensed Master Social Worker at the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. “It’s really tied into our overarching goal of rebuilding not only the state workforce, but also mental health services. Presenting this information at conferences and to various state officials, we believe will help us be better advocate for what we need.”

The Hochul administration has made efforts to improve state-operated bed capacity but more needs to be done. In 2022, the state invested \$27.5 million to support increased reimbursement rates for inpatient psychiatric beds, but in 2023, 850 beds remained offline.

“Even with additional resources, it’s clear the private provider network does not have the financial incentive to address the needs of New Yorkers,” said DiAntonio. “They simply aren’t accountable. This critical shortage has now lasted years, and it’s time for a change. Reinvest in State mental health staffing and services so New Yorkers can receive the care they deserve.”

[Click here for the complete Cornell report.](#)



Performance Award changes coming for eligible PEF members

By NAJEE WALKER

Performance awards, also sometimes called longevity payments, are annual lump sum payments typically given to PEF members who have been at the top of their salary grade for at least 5 years. Historically, performance awards of \$1,250 were provided at five to nine years at the top of one's salary grade and performance awards of \$2,500 were provided at 10 or more years at the top of one's salary grade. With the ratification of the 2019-2023 PEF/State Collective Bargaining Agreement, the 5-year award was increased to \$1,500, the 10-year award was increased to \$3,000. In 2020, a \$4,500 15-year award was added.

This year, in April 2025, additional changes are coming to performance awards that will put even more money in many PEF members' pockets.

The major change deals with the eligibility criteria.

Instead of members becoming eligible as they reach five, 10 and 15 years at the top of their salary grade, members will now be eligible upon reaching 12 years of continuous state service. State service includes continuous years of service, regardless of whether a member was a part of PEF or not during those entire 12 years. This means members who were once part of different bargaining units, like CSEA, will be eligible for this new performance award criteria as long as they have the requisite years of state service.

"This is something that the Contract Team fought hard to achieve as many members have been promoted into the PEF unit and we didn't want them to not have those years count," said PEF Director of Contract Administration Debra Greenberg. "In addition, many members could have decades of State service but because of promotions, never received a performance award because they never reached five years at top of grade during their career. Now, we might have members going from never having received a longevity payment to receiving the 22-year \$4,500 award!"

Performance Award Levels as of April 2025

For members who have between 12 to 16 years of state service, the award is a \$1,500 lump sum payment. For members with 17 to 21 years of service, the payment increases to \$3,000 and for members with 22 years of service or more, the payment increases to \$4,500.

Members who have worked for the state for 12 continuous years as of March 31, 2025, will be eligible for performance awards in April 2025, provided they don't have an unsatisfactory performance evaluation in the prior year.

Greenberg said that PEF members who were eligible for previous performance awards in 2024, which were based on the top salary grade requirement, will be "grandfathered" into the new system and will not lose their longevity payments even if they do not meet the new years of State service eligibility criteria.



OTDA Labor-Management team and PEF join forces to nix outsourcing of backlogged medical consultant cases to Florida

By KATE STICKLES



It was teamwork on every level – from the agency labor-management committee to the PEF Field Services and Legislative departments to PEF’s top elected leaders - that successfully stopped the state from sending PEF members’ work to medical consultants in Florida.

The Disability Determinations Division

(DDD), a federally funded subgroup of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), comprises around 90 members who handle federal disability claims and, with thanks to short staffing, there was a backlog of more than 11,000 cases awaiting medical consultant review heading into September 2024.

The issue was raised by PEF members at the labor/management table for at least eight months and the team offered several avenues to address it, including redeploying assets and hiring, but they never got off the table, said Leslie Apacible, Council Leader of Division 399 and the statewide DDD labor/management chair.

“There was discussion but no resolution,” she said. “We were at an L/M meeting and as soon as we got out, they sent an email saying, ‘Great news, we have developed a plan to send cases to Florida for their medical consultants to sign off on.’ News spread very quickly. I heard from four or five members with concerns right away.”

Apacible immediately called together the L/M team to discuss the news, and the decision was made to reach out to PEF for assistance countering the state’s decision and offering reasons why it was not the right approach.

“Medical consultants are hourly, non-statutory employees,” she said. “Why would New York be outsourcing this work to Florida of all places? If New York State continues to outsource our work what will eventually happen to our non-statutory employees? Labor has tried to push management in hiring staff and now we are at a form of outsourcing. This is a slippery slope.”

PEF Director of Field Services Katie Vorwald and Field Representative Ryan Stoliker gathered information to back up the local leaders in talks with management both at the table and during informal meetings.

“They were extremely helpful,” said PEF Executive Board representative Scott Staub, a disability analyst at OTDA. “Management was coming up with rationale to justify this flawed approach and PEF’s Field team did the [research](#) that we used to counter their narrative. Management was saying the feds were supportive of the approach. Meanwhile, the feds were also saying we are in the top tier - we are getting cases out in 110 days, but you look at Texas, that is backed up 300 days. So, we knew we needed to educate the management team on how this flawed approach would slow down response times, impair investigations and ultimately diminish services to affected New Yorkers.”

Staub said they also spoke with PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons because this work comes to the state via the federal government, and it is federally funded.

“We only have this work because the feds give us this work,” he said. “We don’t support any outsourcing; PEF members have demonstrated they can do it more efficiently and effectively, and most importantly, New Yorkers should be making decisions that affect New Yorkers.”

PEF staff and leaders, including President Wayne Spence, reached out to state and federal elected leaders, as well as the Deputy Commissioner at OTDA and the Governor’s Office.

“President Spence said this flawed plan is inefficient and would take work from New York and give it to Florida, a Right-to-Work state,” Staub said. “None of this made any sense. While we had this backlog, our workers handled 60,000 cases and Florida’s consultants handled maybe 3,000; what they did was minimal and the stress they caused was unnecessary.”

In mid-November, the State announced the work would no longer be contracted out to Florida and would be handled by the DDD in New York.

Apacible said it was a great team effort with a great outcome.

“Having all of that work being pushed out to a non-union state for no practical reason was a huge concern,” she said. “New York State should be the priority, not other states. We had open communication with management through the help of President Spence. This one was a big win!”



PEF Division 236 members posing for a group photo following completion of Desert Waters program

PEF parole officers come together to combat fatigue and practice mental health wellness

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF parole officers have a stressful and demanding job. That's why officers Vikky Urena and Faith Cochran created a training program with [Desert Waters Correctional Outreach](#) to help them practice mental health wellness.

The work started two years ago, when Urena and Cochran were introduced to the "Improving the Well Being of Corrections Professionals" (IWCP) course. They experienced firsthand the benefits and got to work figuring out how to deliver them to their fellow members.

With the help of PEF Health & Safety and other members within PEF Division 236 (Parole), they were able to get a program funded and ready by November 2024.

The program, much like the original IWCP course, was designed not only to teach members valuable ways to navigate their stress while on and off duty, but also to keep those practices in mind and teach others the same skills. Additionally, the original course only applied to corrections staff. Division 236 made sure to include other staff members in re-entry and senior positions as well.

The week-long training was held November 18-22, 2024, at PEF headquarters outside Albany. Twenty-four members attended and they were assisted by two trainers from Desert Waters. They were

challenged to confront emotional truths about their work, while also working with others to find ways to channel those emotions into action, healing and growth. Members shared stories of toxic work environments, troubling mental health, and more.

"The first day was very emotional. I came in feeling like a Debbie Downer, or like I didn't have any hope," said Takenya Benbow, a Senior Parole Officer from New York City. "But by the end of it I felt encouraged. It was good to be with my peers who knew and felt the same things I was going through, and to be able to process that with my peers was great."

"Going through the fatigue part of the training where it shows us how we've changed from the day we graduated from the academy to now, with some of us having 17 or 18 years of experience under us, it can be heart wrenching," said Urena, who works out of the Brooklyn parole office. "It makes you wonder if you can possibly do another 30 years? And for me, since I came into this work later in my career, can I do it for even another 10?"

"My anxiety was high already for this, since I wanted to make sure it went well. But then, to also go into the content, my anxiety almost felt doubled," said Cochran, a parole revocation specialist out of New Rochelle, N.Y. "We tried to pick the right people for this, and I feel that we absolutely did that."



Division 236 Steward Vikky Urena gives direction to other Division 236 members on final day of training

Gina Lopez, the council leader of PEF Division 236 and a parole officer based in Rochester, echoed the sentiments of Urena and Cochran, but added how important it was to demonstrate to both the union and management that training like this really works.

"Sometimes you have push back and naysayers who are only concerned about how much money is being spent," said Lopez. "Ultimately, I think not only does it work, but it also really empowers people. We're doing what it takes to combat our own issues while also helping to retain our workforce and give ourselves a leg up."

Urena, Cochran and Lopez said that they were glad that the members who attended the training felt empowered and validated. They are all hopeful that members who participated will utilize what they learned and keep finding new ways of coping and relief.

Still, the work is not done. Members who attended the inaugural training will go on to train others, and will keep in touch with Urena, Cochran and Lopez, as well as the trainers from Desert Waters, in order to stay up-to-date on training methods and materials.

"This is truly the beginning," said Cochran. "We'll go on to have a coaching session and get certified and we will continue to work on the logistics of rolling out the training to more people."

For Urena, Cochran, Lopez and others working hard at DOCCS, the goal is wellness in all its forms. They want management, and even the governor, to hear the message they're sending with this work.

"We're much more than just what we do for a living and our wellness matters," said Cochran.

"It is a misconception that we as officers do not have anything to be fearful or sad about," said Lopez. "When a parolee is impacted or we have to take care of them, we lose time with our families and we need to take care of ourselves, too."

"We're more than our salary grades and our titles," said Urena. "We're poets and bakers and small business owners. Big brothers and sisters. Daughters, mentors. We want people to see us as human too. We look like everybody in the community that we serve."



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Women's Committee ready to hit the ground running in 2025

By **MICHELE ROSELLO, CHAIR, PEF STATEWIDE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE**

Greetings and salutations from the chair of the Statewide Women's Committee! I would first like to wish all my union siblings a healthy, happy, and prosperous new year filled with love, light, and laughter. Since the last report of the committees' events and activities, the Statewide Women's Committee continues to work on building and growing the membership and developing activities and events of interest for members to participate in.

I am happy to report that we held a very successful meet and greet during the 46th annual PEF Convention in Syracuse last September. The theme for our event was "We Deserve Good Things." The location of the event, the Parkview Hotel, was off site from the main activities of the Convention, but the size and warmth of the space made for a relaxed setting that allowed the attendees, current members and new members, to engage easily and informally with each other. We had a great mix of members, from way up in PEF Region 3 and 4 all the way down to Regions 8 through 12.

As members arrived, they were given a survey and a raffle ticket. The raffle tickets were for a chance to win a new Statewide Women's Committee t-shirt, which existing committee members proudly wore, and a spa basket that was donated by President Wayne Spence.

The survey gathered information from the attendees about the types of events they'd be interested in and the frequency at which such events and meetings should be held. If you would like to complete a survey, you can reach out to me at Michele.Rosello@pef.org and include "survey" in the subject line.

As the newly appointed chair of the Statewide Women's Committee, I acknowledged and thanked Region 11 Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor, who had first appointed me to the position of chair of the Regions 10 & 11 Women's Committee. I also thanked Scarlett Ahmed, the former chairperson of the committee, for recommending me to the President to succeed her.

I am happy to announce that next month I will be traveling to meet more members who are interested in joining and participating in the Statewide Women's Committee at the upcoming Regions 1-5 Leadership Conference, which will be held in Ithaca, Feb. 21-23. I look forward to learning about the interests of these members and how the committee can support and be a resource to them.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the aftermath of feelings some members may have experienced following the U.S. presidential election. I ask that we give each other grace and make space for ourselves and others who may still be experiencing unpredictable waves of anger, confusion, and hopelessness.

In an effort to demonstrate our collective strength and demand and defend our freedoms, I invite anyone interested to join the People's March for Women's Rights on Jan. 18, 2025. There are several marches being held in different parts of the country on that date, from Washington, D.C., to New York City and several areas throughout New York. If you are interested in attending the New York City march, please contact me at Michele.Rosello@pef.org and put in the subject line "Women's March." You can also visit www.peoplesmarch.com for details or to see if there is a march or action near you.

The tentative planning guide for the Statewide Woman's Committee continues to be developed. I have involved myself in a variety of constituency groups in order to network and collaborate with other union women's groups. As a reminder, March is Women's Herstory Month and if there is a particular activity or event that you would like to participate in or host, please let me know by contacting me at Michele.Rosello@pef.org with the subject line "Women's Herstory."



John Thomsen

How long have you been a PEF member? 20+ years.

What do you do in your state role?

I am the Outreach Training Branch Director for the Office of Emergency Management. In a nutshell, we deliver emergency management training to local officials and first responders (using federal grants) with a focus on training gaps, plans and needs to foster emergency planning, operational coordination, equipment, training and exercises. To accomplish this, I manage around 100 miscellaneous agency trainers and contract trainers to deliver more than 50 programs and two National Emergency Basic Academies per year.

What positions do you hold in PEF?

I am the Council Leader of Division 179, which includes 1,250 members at two statewide agencies -- Homeland Security (DHSES) and Office of General Services (OGS), including the Business Service Center (BSC). I hold Executive Board Seat No. 127 -- Homeland Security. I have been Labor Management Chair and co-chair of the Health and Safety Committee for Homeland Security and Emergency Services and have been a Convention Delegate for about 10 years.

Why did you get involved in the union and as a leader?

Before Homeland Security and Emergency Services was formed by consolidating six state agencies, I belonged to a small PEF Division, Division 330, at the Office of Emergency Management. Several things influenced me and helped me engage with the union. We had trouble maintaining officers because of our size and we didn't know the rules. I became quickly educated to what bullying bosses are capable of without management training or emotional intelligence. Two key PEF leaders brought me the experience and coaching I needed to function (albeit at a minimal level) -- Warren Lew, who was around when PEF was formed, and Tom Capone, a PEF Field representative at the time. They were both sages of wisdom who kept my inexperience in check. Then, when our new DHSES agency was formed combining the offices of Cyber Security, Fire Protection and Control, Emergency Management, Counter Terrorism, Disaster Recovery, and Interoperable Communications, we became a hosted agency under OGS. As the small Division Council Leader, I learned that someone said they consulted me about merging with OGS since our agency was now "hosted," but they had not communicated with me at all. That was a different kind of motivation, so I agreed to the merge, which included merging with OGS Steward Council. I learned a lot from those Division leaders while I took to heart my mission to learn everything PEF does behind the scenes. After about three years I became Council Leader of the new combined Division.



John Thomsen, Executive Board Seat No. 127 and PEF Division 179 Council Leader

Please comment on the value of public employees.

In my agency, it is easy to see the direct benefits we provide. Our work is often cited by the Governor in State of the State addresses. But we also partner with county officials and the 30 State Agencies that make up the the States Disaster Preparedness Commission (DPC). Under the authority of our agency and Article 2B, we (with the Governor's office), we bring the full capacity of state agency response to disasters and emergencies and initiate the federal assistance protocols provided in state and federal law.



PEF Executive Board members pose for a photograph at the conclusion of their quarterly board meeting on Dec. 6, 2024, in Albany.

PEF Executive Board meets for final time in 2024

By **KATE STICKLES**

The PEF Executive Board held its final meeting of 2024 on December 5 and 6 in Albany, welcoming the New York State Department of Civil Service director to discuss the new Anthem dental plan, hearing a presentation on privatization of mental health services from Cornell, and conducting other business of the union.

PEF finances

The Bonadio Group found no concerns during its audit of the union's March 31, 2024, financial statements.

"Everything went as planned and smoothly," said Thomas Gianatasio, Bonadio's regional managing partner for the Capital Region. "If we were making any substantial audit adjustments, we would need to disclose that. We did not propose any. Your financial numbers given to us were in compliance."

Gianatasio said there were no concerns with PEF's fair market value of investments, or its calculation of post-retirement health care costs, and the union's asset balances are healthy.

Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue said: "PEF continues to be in a strong financial position. We are up almost 2,700 members and that's an unbelievable accomplishment and a testament to all who are working on this."

Net cash investments as of Sept. 20, 2024, totaled approximately \$26 million; investment balances have increased; and dues income was \$717,542 over budget as the union surpassed 53,000 paying members.

The Executive Board passed budget amendments reflecting actual expenditures and resulting in a zero net change to the overall budget, including union leave expenses, temporary hire expenses, and contributions.



Vickie Sweet (Workers' Compensation Board), Francis McIntyre (Department of Financial Services), Gustavo Santos (Department of Transportation), and Brittany Lacik (SUNY Upstate) pose for a photo after being sworn in as members of the PEF Executive Board on Dec. 5, 2024, in Albany.

COPE successes

PEF President Wayne Spence reported the union is the closest it has ever come to meeting its Committee on Political Education (COPE) contribution obligations, which are set by parent union SEIU for each of its locals. COPE funds help PEF advocate for federal legislation, funding and policies that support union priorities. He credited COPE Coordinator Don Morganstern's tenacity for the success.

Morganstern said COPE contributions as of Oct. 31, 2024, are up 16.4% and the number of contributors has increased by more than 10%.

"We have done pretty good this year," he said. "Retirees have been amazing; contributions are up significantly." He reported a total of \$234,700 as of Oct. 31, 2024, up from \$201,559 the same time last year.

Dental discussion

As concerns about new State dental provider Anthem mount, the Executive Board invited state Civil Service Commissioner Timothy Hogues to discuss what the union is hearing from its members across the state.

"Anthem won and they made a lot of promises," President Spence said. "It does not seem that they are living up to these promises."

President Spence said it's been a mixed bag: Some dentists report higher reimbursements and others are receiving lower; many providers listed on Anthem's website as in-network, either don't know they are or no longer are in network; and there remain dental provider shortages, especially in the North Country, Western New York, and among specialists.

PEF is soliciting feedback from members at and has been working to address issues as they are reported. The union will send out a survey in the new year, but until then, members may continue to email Communicator@pef.org. Please include the name of the dentist you're writing about, as well as personal contact information (phone or email address) so that a PEF staff member can get back to you if necessary. The union will also use this information in discussions with the New York State Department of Civil Service and the Office of Employee Relations.

Daniel Yanulavich, the director of the Employee Benefits Division at the Department of Civil Service, said there have been issues with the transition, but there is now a finite contract.

"We do think this is a bigger network, but it's not perfect," he said. "We have been working with PEF staff on a daily basis, particularly around the provider network directory and key areas where it is lacking. The good news is that we have a contract now, which we did not have with Emblem. We did not have a lot of teeth. We do have a contract that has performance guarantees and if they do not meet those guarantees we will hold them to those. Right now, they are meeting those.

"We are doing independent research on providers to make sure their network is accurate, but it takes time," Yanulavich said. "We have to fully vet these things, and we need to address them with Anthem."

He acknowledged the provider directory on the [Anthem website](#) needs to be fixed and encouraged members to continue to reach out to the union with concerns and feedback on their experiences.

"You have a collective voice," Hogues said. "If you are not receiving what you should be, let your voice be heard."

Membership update

PEF Director of Organizing Scott Harms said membership jumped dramatically, with an increase of 611 members since August 2024, and an increase of more than 2,000 since the beginning of the year, bringing PEF to a total of 53,738 dues-paying members. Of the more than 58,000 State employees in the Professional, Scientific and Technical bargaining unit, 93% have joined the union and are paying dues.

"Our goal was 1,500 new members in 2024, and we have already far exceeded that," Harms said.

That said, total nonmembers in the unit are also starting to increase as hiring increases.

"Reaching all members has become more challenging and additional efforts are needed from everyone in the union," said Harms.

Harms has implemented robust non-member look-backs and opt-out prevention procedures.

"There remains a lot of concern over various groups who are actively trying to get members to drop the union," he said. "We have done a tremendous job in preventing these efforts."

PEF has a robust drop protocol policy. Any member thinking about leaving PEF should be encouraged to call the Organizing Department at (518) 785-1900.

Election 2024

PEF-endorsed candidates fared well during the November 2024 election. The overwhelming majority of PEF-endorsed candidates at every level – U.S. Senate, U.S. House, NYS Senate, and NYS Assembly – won re-election. The union endorses candidates who support the labor movement and PEF's priorities.

"We did really well on a state level," reported PEF Legislative Director Pat Lyons. "Now we have a new (federal) administration coming in and we are hoping for the best so that New York continues to get the support it needs to maintain programs and services."

New York currently receives around \$90 billion in federal funding for various programs, including significant monies related to Medicaid, and various services offered by DOCCS, State Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Transportation.

"We are planning to reach out to other unions to remind congressional delegates that we still need to get what we need, and we can't accept cuts," concluded Lyons.

Studying privatization

As part of the union's Fund Our Future campaign, PEF partnered with researchers at the Worker Institute and the Buffalo Co-Lab at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) to conduct a study on the impact of austerity and privatization on wages and employment in the mental health care sector.

Anne Marie Brady, the Senior Extension Associate – Research Director of Worker Rights and Equity at the ILR, presented some of the organization's findings to the board, exploring the implications for workers' terms of employment and wages, the quality of care provided, and the composition of the workforce since 2000.

"The bottom line, trends toward privatization and state government austerity in the New York state mental health workforce are costing New Yorkers good paying union jobs, and the good jobs being lost have been disproportionately held by women and African Americans," Brady said. "Our research demonstrates what happens when this essential pathway for African American economic and social mobility runs up against austerity and the privatization of public sector jobs."

(The Communicator will feature a complete story on the ILR report in the December/January issue.)

Division changes

The Executive Board approved two Division changes recommended by the Divisions Committee – one creating a new division and another combining members into a single Division.

Region 3 members in Division 325, the NYS Division of Veterans Affairs, will now be part of Division 278, the Rochester Regional Department of Labor. Members at the Office of Children and Family Services Industry Residential/Industry Secure Center were approved to secede from Division 216 and create their own division, Division 414.

The next Executive Board meeting will take place March 27-28, 2025, in Albany.



Region 5 Coordinator David Dubofsky, left, who is stepping down from that role as of Dec. 31, 2024, poses with a plaque President Spence presented him for his nine years of EBoard service.

Workers' Comp benefits expanded to include work-related stress

One of PEF's legislative priorities was signed into law by Gov. Kathy Hochul on Dec. 5, 2024. The law removes significant barriers for workers wishing to access New York State Workers' Compensation benefits to cover work-related stress injuries. This new law applies to every level of the Civil Service workforce. Previously, work-related stress claims were only available for police, firefighters, EMTs, paramedics and emergency dispatchers.

"PEF members are often subjected to very traumatizing situations," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "This will allow members who experience horrific events to get the mental health treatment they need without facing a loss of income. We thank Governor Hochul and the bills' sponsors, Senator Jessica Ramos and Assemblymember Karines Reyes, for continuing to make mental health a priority."

After a decade of budget cuts and service reductions at the Office of Mental Health (OMH), Governor Hochul has made substantive efforts to restore state-operated mental health services, including dedicating more than \$87 million to re-open 350 state-operated mental health beds at OMH facilities.

PEF continues to lobby for additional staff and resources for state-operated mental health facilities to address mental health issues across the State as part of the union's ["Fund Our Future for a Thriving New York"](#) campaign.





Four board seats filled; petitioning to begin for 5 more and Region 5 Coordinator

Four Executive Board members were seated following balloting during the October 2024 Special Election cycle.

Gina Corona won **Seat 295**, OMH Hutchings; Sametta Shaw-Lipiec won **Seat 300**, OPWDD – Central NY DDSO; Brooke Bosch won **Seat 350**, OPWDD – Taconic DDSO; and Scott Wendt won **Seat 530**, DOT.

A full Executive Board ensures that all members of the union are represented and have a seat at the table for discussions and voting on the business of the union.

There are currently five vacant seats and members in those constituencies are urged to participate in the special election with the start of petitioning on Jan. 6, 2025. In addition, the Region 5 coordinator position will be vacant as of the new year.

"The PEF Executive Board meets quarterly to review the union's finances; get briefings on membership trends, department activities, campaigns and initiatives; to discuss the top priorities on the union's agenda; and so much more," said President Wayne Spence. "I encourage anyone who is eligible and interested to run for election."

The vacancies are listed below:

- **Region 5 Coordinator**
Tompkins, Tioga, Broome, Chenango, Otsego, Delaware counties
- **Seat 15: Civil Service**
1 seat statewide (08000)
- **Seat 90: Higher Education Services Corporation**
1 seat statewide (11100)

- **Seat 161: Ex Criminal Justice SV**
State Police (01060), Criminal Justice Sv (01490)

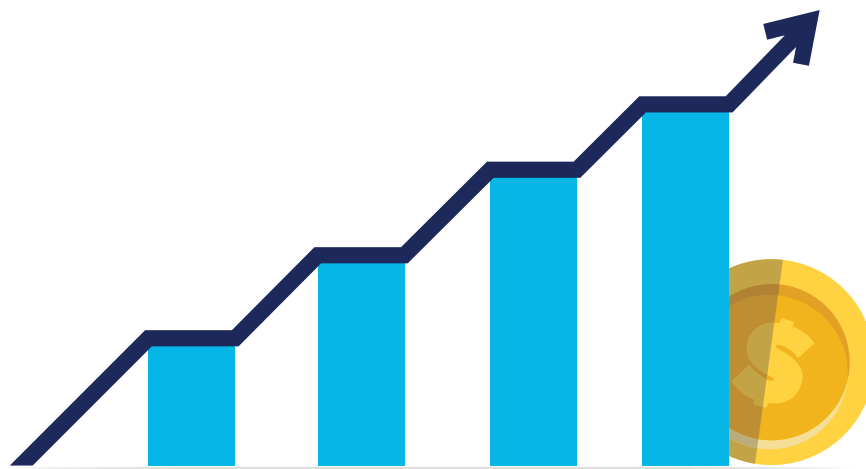
- **Seat 165: Justice Center**
Housing & Community Renewal (01080), Veterans Affairs (01190), Justice Center (01160), Office of Cannabis Management (01033)

- **Seat 200:** 200 Helen Hayes (12030), Veterans Home Batavia (12180), Veterans Home NYC (12150), Veterans Home Oxford (12120), Veterans Home Montrose (12190)

Petitioning ends Jan. 28, 2025. For any contested election, ballots will be mailed Feb. 19, 2025, by American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be returned to the address listed on the return envelope no later than 5 p.m. March 12, 2025. Ballots will be counted March 13, 2025.

For more information, election rules, and petitions, visit www.pef.org/elections. For hardcopy petitions, contact the PEF Divisions Department at 800-342-4306 ext. 337 to have a supply mailed to you. Petitions will not be available for pick-up at PEF Headquarters or any PEF Regional Office.

If you have any questions, email the PEF Special Elections Committee at SpecialElections@pef.org.



Engineering titles across New York State receive pay increases

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Governor Kathy Hochul announced this month the approval of pay increases for professional engineers, architects, land surveyors, landscape architects and geologists across New York State. [In a press release](#), the governor touted the increases as an effort to recruit and retain state workers. About 2,600 employees, the majority of them PEF members, will benefit.

“New Yorkers rely on the skills and expertise of engineers to build roads and bridges, construct large scale buildings, and prevent disasters from occurring,” Governor Hochul said in her announcement. “Engineering and the licensed positions that support it are some of the most competitive jobs in the world, and after extensive study of the job market, it is clear that state government needs to do more to attract a world class talent pool to New York’s public sector. The investment in these geographic pay differentials is a smart investment in the future of the Empire State.”

The pay increases will impact eligible employees at about 20 state agencies. The agencies with the highest number of affected employees include the Department of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Department of Health and the Office of General Services. The increases come in the form of geographic pay differentials (geos) and an increased hiring rate (IHR).

IHRs boost the hiring rate to a higher step in a title’s pay schedule. In this case, the approved IHR for engineering titles sets the hiring rate to step 4. Employees currently below step 4 will see their salary increased to this step and new hires will be hired at step 4.

The IHR only applies to positions in the approved titles in Bronx, Queens, Dutchess, Richmond, Kings, Rockland, Nassau, Suffolk, New York, Sullivan, Orange, Ulster, Putnam and Westchester counties. The approved titles are varied and include Architect 1, Landscape Architect 1, Professional Engineer 1, several Assistant positions, Mechanical/HVAC, Professional Geologist 1 and more.

The same downstate counties are approved for geos as well of up to \$13,500. All other counties were approved for \$7,000 geos. Those are both maximum amounts of payments. Agencies may decide not to give the full approved amount. However, agencies typically offer the maximum.

While these increases are effective as of December 5, 2024, changes in pay for eligible employees will not begin until January 23, 2025, for the institution payroll and January 29, 2025, for the administration payroll.

“We commend Governor Hochul for her commitment to investing in the State workforce to recruit and retain top talent,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “The PEF members impacted by these pay increases are highly skilled public servants who play critical roles protecting and maintaining New York’s vital infrastructure. Offering compensation on par with the private sector is a positive move toward attracting talented professionals to state employment.”

PEF members looking to confirm eligibility for the IHR and geo pay in their respective county should contact their agency HR department or personnel office.

Editor’s note: The PEF Civil Service Enforcement/Research Department has produced an [FAQ](#) with all this information and more.



Seeking donations for marathon benefiting Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

By KATE STICKLES

Elaine Morris, a PEF member and steward at the State Education Department in Albany, is running the Walt Disney World's Goofy Challenge next month and is seeking support from her union family! Elaine runs in memory of her running buddy and co-worker Dave Clapp, who lost his battle with leukemia, as well as current PEF member Carrie Williams (DOCCS-Central Office), who is battling a rare blood disorder.

The Goofy Challenge consists of a half marathon (13.1 miles) on January 11, 2025, followed by a marathon (26.2 miles) the very next day!

Morris has challenged herself to raise \$5,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and hopes other union siblings will join her team and help her reach her goal. The deadline for donations is within one week of the race.

"I would love to report that I received 100% participation from PEF members in Region 8," she said. "Can you imagine if every PEF member donated \$1? I would not only meet, but exceed my goal."

[You can make a donation here.](#)





Are you interested in a career with PEF?

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

www.pef.org/careers-at-pef

Region 7 helps homeless veterans

By NAJEE WALKER

Enlisted for Life is a non-profit organization that seeks to help veterans who have fallen on hard times. When Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky heard of the organization and their mission, she knew PEF members in the North Country would want to help.

“Chris Lanz and I met with Sean Carroll, found of Enlisted for Life and the first veteran of the program, Jason,” said Stransky. “Jason, a Marine, originally from Franklin County, emphasized how important the program is to him. Enlisted for Life is providing him with housing and vocational training in hopes of a fresh start.”

Region 7 members donated blankets, towels, paper supplies, snacks and cleaning supplies to stock the bedrooms for the incoming veterans. Some even brought instant meal items like macaroni and cheese bowls and instant coffee.

“Many cleaning supplies and personal care supplies are still needed,” said Stransky. “I was honored to present these donations to Enlisted for Life.”

Stransky felt strongly about the mission of Enlisted for Life, and decided Region 7 should do everything they can to help them achieve their goals.

“People who have served our country and fought to protect our freedoms should never be homeless,” said Stransky. “The term ‘homeless veterans’ should not exist in our society.”

“The multiple boxes of things Barbara brought is huge,” said Carroll. “It amounts to at least eight months of savings that I can use to put towards their food, which costs \$900 a month, or their housing, which is \$600 a month.”

Carroll spent 18 months in Afghanistan as a contractor with the State Department, and struggled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) upon his return.

“I came home to nothing. I had nowhere to go,” he recalled. “But it was actually a man I saw in Manhattan in 2018 that made me realize what I needed to do.”

The man in Manhattan was a Vietnam veteran. After spending hours with him, Carroll decided to make it his mission to help him and other veterans who too often struggle to find housing, jobs, and essentials after returning from war.

Carroll described the focus of Enlisted for Life in “phases,” with Phase One being outreach — finding veterans and speaking with them to help get them started.

“When we started, it was all about feeding and clothing homeless veterans. We were basically paying out of pocket,” said Carroll. “Our supplies dwindled pretty fast, but eventually people started spreading the word and donating to help.”

This is where Phase Two kicked in. Carroll began getting calls from veterans who needed help getting to their healthcare appointments. He and his team, now firmly established in and around the Saratoga area, began providing rides, donating power chairs and even building wheelchair ramps when needed.

“It was all about trying to help vets make ends meet,” he said. “At this point, I knew that we wanted to bring veterans from being dependent to independent. So, we’ve begun moving into Phase Three.”

Phase Three is to create a safe place where homeless veterans can live and rebuild their lives. Enlisted for Life’s goal is to take homeless veterans and “get them back to zero.”

“Zero” is the place where a veteran feels respected and safe enough to build a life again. Carroll personally evaluates each veteran, making sure they are ready to do the hard work of rebuilding their lives.

“We want to know what works before we start scaling up. We have a good amount of funding and some resources, but we want to make sure we have as much as possible before we move ahead,” said Carroll.

Enlisted for Life was able to secure dormitories located in Plattsburgh as part of a partnership with [MHAB](#) a nonprofit that helps people in all stages of recovery. Starting in January 2025, the program will provide food, housing, counseling resources, healthcare and other services. The program will also offer job opportunities and help veterans open bank accounts and build financial success.

Carroll is providing housing for eight veterans to start. He hopes to find someone willing to donate an eight-passenger van, new or used.

Anyone wishing to donate to Enlisted for Life can do so by visiting the [website](#).

“PEF and Barbara have been so critical in helping us get up and running,” said Carroll. “If not for you, we would not be here. It truly takes a community to get a homeless veteran off the streets.”





Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky outside the Enlisted for Life dormitories, presenting supplies donated by Region 7 to Enlisted for Life founder Sean Carroll and Jason, a veteran going through the program.



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PEF in the News



DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

PEF nurse featured in news on Downstate

Nurse Cynthia Walker was interviewed on camera by NY 1 during a rally at SUNY Downstate.

“We don’t want to be relocated, we don’t want to go to a wing in another hospital, we want to stay here in our community. This is the governor’s hospital. This is a state hospital. This is her hospital.”

[View the story here.](#)



President Spence quoted in story on “inflation rebate”

Under a plan announced December 9, New York would offer a one-time payment of up to \$500 to State taxpayers to help offset higher costs brought on by inflation in recent years.

The Governor’s Office quoted President Spence and other state labor leaders in its press release.

Read the story in the *Times Union* [here](#). Read the press release [here](#).

Governor announces pay increases

Thousands of PEF members will receive pay increases, including professional engineers, architects, land surveyors, landscape architects and geologists. To help improve recruitment and retention among the state’s workforce, approximately 2,600 employees across 18 state agencies will be receiving pay increases ranging from \$7,000 to \$13,500 depending on their position and geographic location.

PEF wrote about the story in this edition of *The Pulse*. [WRGB-TV](#) in Albany picked it up from the [Governor’s press release](#), which quoted President Spence and other labor leaders.



Retirees in Action: Understanding service credit

By **PATRICK MCLAUGHLIN, President of Chapter 9 PEF Retirees**

Prior state service (service credit) is very important to understand before an active PEF member retires. I've compiled information below that will explain the service credit process and I hope you will find it helpful.

What is service credit?

Service credit is a core component of your New York State and Local Retirement System (NYSLRS) membership. It determines when you are entitled to a pension even if you leave public service before you are eligible to retire (vested). It is one of the eligibility requirements for retirement benefits, death benefits and loans. For most members, the total service credit they have at retirement will directly affect the amount of their pension.

Once you become a NYSLRS member, you receive service credit for all your paid public employment beginning with your date of membership. The amount of credit you receive is based on your earnings and service information your employer reports to the New York State Comptroller's Office.

Earning service as a member

Once you become a NYSLRS member, you receive service credit for all your public employment beginning with your date of membership. NYSLRS refers to this as mandatory service. If you are required to contribute a percentage of your earnings toward your retirement benefits (Tiers 3, 4, 5 and 6 members, and Tier 2 members in a contributory plan), you must pay the contributions that are associated with your mandatory service. Generally, these mandatory contributions are deducted from your pay and sent to the NYSLRS by your employer.

If there is a period after your date of membership when your employer did not deduct contributions (or deducted insufficient contributions), you will still receive credit for your employment, but you must pay these mandatory contributions plus interest. The NYSLRS will automatically notify your employer to take payroll deductions until the amount is paid. If you have outstanding mandatory contributions when you retire, your pension will be permanently reduced to cover the cost.

Additional service credit

You may be able to receive additional service credit for public employment before your date of membership or for military service. There is usually a cost for additional service. Purchasing additional service credit is optional, but because service credit is a factor in calculating a NYSLRS pension benefit, purchasing service credit will generally increase your pension benefit.

There are several types of additional service:

- **Previous Service** — Service with a participating employer before you joined NYSLRS.
- **Prior** — Service with a participating employer before the employer elected to participate in NYSLRS.
- **Military** — Service in the United States Armed Forces; the amount of credit available and the cost vary depending upon which section of the law applies.
- **Transferred** — Service from an active membership credited in another New York public retirement system.
- **Withdrawn** — Service from a previously withdrawn membership in NYSLRS or another New York public retirement system.



(See the [Previous Service](#), [Prior Service](#), [Military Service sections](#), as well as [Transferring Service](#) and [Withdrawn Service](#) sections of the NYSLRS website for more details about additional service.)

If you wish to receive credit for additional service, you must request it. See the How to [Request Credit](#) section for details.

Your request will be reviewed to determine and verify your eligibility. If you are eligible, the NYSLRS will notify you of the cost (if any). While you are not required to pay for additional service, you will only receive credit if you purchase it.

For previous and prior service, in addition to paying the associated costs (if any), you must earn two years of service credit as a member before your service can be credited. For certain military service, you must have five years of member service credit. You cannot purchase additional service after your retirement date.

There are certain situations where purchasing additional service credit will not increase your pension. See [Should You Purchase Additional Service Credit](#) for more information.

Previous Service

Previous service is time you worked for a participating employer before you joined NYSLRS. Receiving additional service credit for previous service is optional. You can choose to receive credit, but there is usually a cost.

Example: You worked at the town library while going to school and, as a part-time employee, you chose not to join NYSLRS. When you graduated and took a full-time job at the Town Supervisor's office, you were required to join. You can request credit for the part-time service at the library.

There may be a cost to obtain credit for your previous service (see chart below). You can request and pay the cost for previous service any time, however, you must earn two years of service credit as a NYSLRS member before your purchased service can be credited.

Cost to Purchase Previous Service Credit:

Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4 & 5	Tier 6
For non-contributory plans: Free	For service from 4/1/60 to 6/30/76: 3% of gross earnings	3% of gross earnings plus interest	6% of gross earnings plus interest
For contributory plans: Contribution rate times gross earnings plus interest	For service from 7/1/76 to 12/31/76: Free		
	For service on or after 1/1/77: 3% of gross earnings plus interest		

Prior service

Prior service refers to any period of time during which you received salary from an employer before the employer elected to participate in NYSLRS. Receiving additional service credit for prior service is optional. You can choose to receive credit, but there may be a cost.

- For Tier 2 and 3 members, there is no cost to obtain credit for this service.
- For Tier 4 and 5 members, the cost is 3% of gross earnings plus interest to the date of payment.
- For Tier 6 members, the cost is 6% of gross earnings plus interest to the date of payment.
- Tiers 4, 5 and 6 members can pay for prior service any time, however, you must have earned two years of service credit as a NYSLRS member before your prior service can be credited.

Military service

If you served in the U.S. Armed Forces, you may be eligible to purchase credit for your military service, regardless of whether your military service was before or after you joined NYSLRS.

There are different sections of the law that allow credit for military service. The amount of military service credit you can receive, and

the cost (if any) will vary depending on which section of the law allows the credit.

Additional information about military service credit, including eligibility and application requirements under the different statutes of law, is available on the NYSLRS Military Service Credit page.

How to request credit for previous, prior or military service

To request additional service credit for previous, prior or military service, sign in to your Retirement Online account, scroll down to the 'My Account Summary' area of your Account Homepage and click the "Manage my Service Credit Purchases" button. The Service Credit Purchase Accounts page will appear. Click "Request Additional Service Credit."

You can also apply by mail by submitting a Request to Purchase Service Credit (Including any Military Service) (RS5042), available on the Forms page.

Include as much information as you can about the period of employment for which you are seeking credit. If you are applying for military service credit, upload your Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD-214) in Retirement Online, or enclose a copy with your paper application. The NYSLRS will determine your eligibility and provide a statement of any cost involved.

The NYSLRS must receive your service credit request before your date of retirement.

Requesting credit for your previous, prior or military service as early in your career as possible can be advantageous:

Records we need to verify your service will be more readily available.

If there is a cost, it will be less expensive than if you wait to purchase credit at a later date.

If your tier allows you to discontinue contributions after a defined period of time, you will stop paying contributions sooner.

Your retirement benefit will be processed more quickly if your service credit request has been reviewed or processed prior to retirement.

If you are requesting previous, prior or military service credit to establish eligibility for a vested retirement benefit, you must request this credit while you are on the payroll of a participating employer. If you receive a statement of the cost after you leave the payroll, you must make payment within 30 days of notification.

Note: If you purchased service brings your total credited service to ten or more years, you will no longer be eligible to withdraw your contributions and end your membership.

Verifying your service

When the NYSLRS receives your request for additional service credit, they must first verify your earnings and service dates. They will ask your employer for your monthly earnings and hourly rates of pay. They need this information to determine the amount of credit you are eligible to receive and the cost (if any) to purchase it.

In most instances, your employer will be able to supply this information. However, if records are unavailable, the NYSLRS will accept documents such as W-2 forms from your tax returns or Social Security earnings records.

They may ask you to request a “non-certified detailed (itemized) earnings statement” directly from the Social Security Administration (SSA) by completing form SSA-7050-F4. This form is available from your local SSA office, on the SSA website or by calling 1-800-772-1213. (NYSLRS cannot request the information for you.) There is a service charge to obtain this information from the SSA.

Your detailed (itemized) earnings statement includes the names of your employers and your quarterly earnings for each year requested. The NYSLRS can usually get your pay rates from the state or the appropriate local civil service commission.

You can be credited only for employment with an employer that participates in one of the retirement systems listed in the Withdrawn Service section, or from military service. You cannot receive credit for service with a nonparticipating employer or service performed while not on the payroll, such as independent contractor service.

Contact us

There are several ways to get more information or assistance:

Email form: secure contact form;

Call: 866-805-0990, or 518-474-7736 in the Albany, New York area;

Fax: 518-402-7799; or

Write:
NYSLRS
110 State Street
Albany, NY 12244-0001





Letters to the Editor

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

We want to hear from you!

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

Your fellow 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.

Jolene Bariteau is a rehabilitation specialist 2 at Capital District Psychiatric Center in Albany.

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.

Elizabeth Newman Cable is a patient access supervisor at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo.

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.

Lori DeVito is an administrative specialist 1 at the Office of General 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.

Wayne Green is a maintenance supervisor 3 at St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg.

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.

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

Gerard Mazurkiewicz is a fire protection specialist 1 at the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services in Buffalo.

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

Danielle Newell-Emory is an investigative specialist 1 at the Office of Cannabis Management in Albany.

Cecilia O'Shea is a legal assistant 2 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Albany.

Rosemary Oduh is an information technology specialist 2 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.

Danielle Porter is registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

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.

Kathleen Vonk is a veterans education program representative 2 at the Department of Veterans' Services in Albany.

Nicole Welch is an auditor trainee 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Syracuse.

Jennifer Wells is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

Roslyn Williams is an economic development program specialist 2 at the Department of Agriculture and Markets in Albany.

Jennifer Zullo is a research scientist 2 at the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities 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.





December 12, 2024

'Tis the season! Happy Holidays from PEF Division 357 (Office of Information Technology Services) in the Capital Region

Left to right: VP Bruce Giddings, PEF Division 357 Council Leader Chris Ford, Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger, PEF member Laurie Couture, and PEF Executive Board member Mario Chiarello.



December 3, 2024

PEF Stewards in Regions 10 & 11 benefitted from training with various PEF departments as well as VP Darlene Williams, and Regional Coordinators Tamara Martin and Bernadette O'Connor. Learning how best to advocate for members!



November 28, 2024

Did you spot PEF member and Statewide Women's Committee chair Michele Rosello on Team Snoopy! She was one of hundreds of volunteers who help hold the lines that keep the balloons flying at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

January 8, 2025

A few PEF leaders and staff attended the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, along with reps from AFT and the New York State AFL-CIO, making the case for oversight of Artificial Intelligence when used by the government. They walked the picket line with Culinary Workers Union Local 226, which has been striking Virgin Hotels for better wages and working conditions!





December 20, 2024

PEF members came together in solidarity for a special "1013 (Officer in Need of Assistance)" fundraiser for PEF Parole Officer Michael Stewart, who faces an attempted murder charge for his role subduing an active shooter on Labor Day outside the Kutty Bar & Lounge in the Bronx. Proceeds from the fundraiser will go toward helping defray the costs of P.O. Stewart's legal defense.

December 19, 2024

Region 10 Members enjoyed a beautiful evening at their Holiday Meet and Greet held in Manhattan!



