

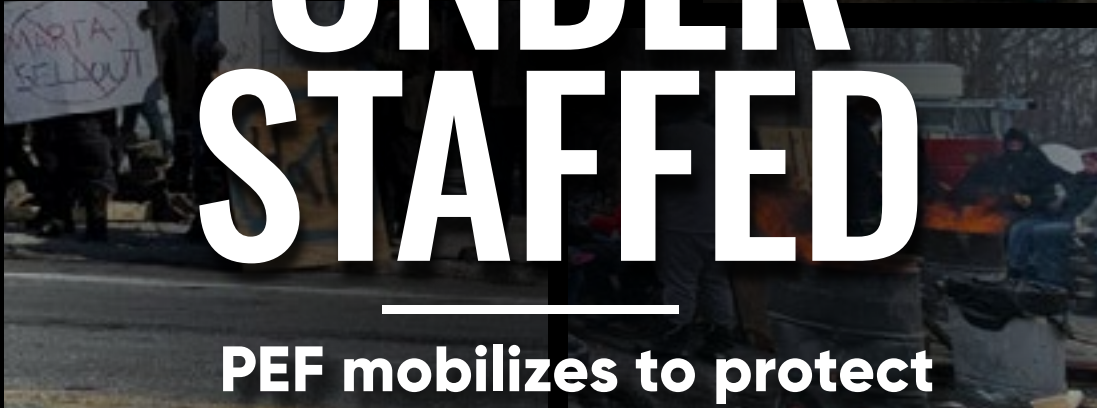
MARCH 2025

# OVER WORKED UNDER STAFFED

**PEF mobilizes to protect  
members during crisis**



Corrections and  
Community Supervision



# Table of Contents

The President's Message	3
PEF protecting members during correctional facility work stoppages across the state	4
Solidarity, political action, education on display at Regions 1-5 Leadership Conference	6
PEF to legislators: Act now to bolster the State workforce	8
PEF members visit State Capitol for annual Lobby Day	10
PEF member's daughter is this year's Celebrity Child for Variety Kids Telethon	12
PEF, AFT, NYSUT rally to 'Protect Our Kids'	13
PEF joins with Federal Unionists Network fighting to "Save Our Services"	14
March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month	16
Doris Ann ("Dee") Dodson, 1950-2025	17
Blast from the Past: New York sought to cut public worker jobs	18
PEF in the News	19
PEF Scholarships available for members and their dependents	20
Retirees in Action: Stay engaged and informed as the federal government makes drastic cuts	22
Members need your leave donations	24
Photo Highlights	25

## THE COMMUNICATOR

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# The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE

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## March comes in like a lion

Last month I began this message with a remark about the accelerated pace of our work in 2025 and as March roars in, I hope for all of us that it does indeed go out like a lamb.

I'm thinking in particular of our union siblings who work for DOCCS and Corrections Based Operations at OMH. They have really stepped up to fill the gaps in service left by the corrections' officers who went on strike. When we got word on President's Day that they were being asked to perform security-related duties way outside their title, [PEF acted fast to negotiate an agreement](#) with the governor protecting their health and safety. Thousands of PEF members are still working 16-hour days or more, sacrificing time with their families to keep the State's correctional facilities operating. I've talked to [multiple media outlets](#) throughout this crisis, emphasizing that as a union leader I understand why NYSCOPBA members felt they had no choice but to walk off the job to get the State's attention. But I hope for everyone involved – from PEF members to the corrections' officers to the incarcerated individuals – that a resolution is reached soon so all State employees can return safely to their jobs.

Meanwhile, the work of the State Legislature continues as they negotiate a State budget with the Governor. [PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio testified](#) late last month before the Joint Workforce Committee and the union held a well-attended [Lobby Day and Legislative Reception](#) this week. I urge you to [send digital letters](#) to your local lawmakers supporting PEF's priorities. PEF Organizing will also have hard copies at all union events this month if you prefer to sign your name and we'll deliver the letters to lawmakers.

A couple other stories to point out in this issue of The Communicator: It's scholarship season for young men and women heading off to college in the fall, so keep an eye on our [scholarship page](#) for the latest union opportunities. Council Leaders, please let us know about any division scholarships you're offering by sending a note to [Communicator@pef.org](mailto:Communicator@pef.org). And lastly, congratulations to Evelyn, chosen as the "Celebrity Child" for this month's Variety Kids Telethon in Buffalo. She's the daughter of a PEF member at Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center with an inspiring story that brings hope to everyone who hears it.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence



# OVER WORKED AND UNDER STAFFED



Corrections and  
Community Supervision

## PEF protecting members during correctional facility work stoppages across the state

By **COMMUNICATIONS STAFF**

On Feb. 17, President's Day, media outlets began reporting corrections officers (COs) at several statewide facilities were engaging in work stoppages in protest of working conditions and short staffing. Later that same day, PEF sent an email to all members at DOCCS and Corrections Based Operations associated with OMH, informing them about their rights, if they were asked to report to a facility to do work typically performed by COs.

"We explained to members and leaders their rights to avoid being placed in unsafe environments and hosted a statewide Zoom meeting for impacted members," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "As soon as we heard about it, our first priority was the health and safety of our members. These are dangerous jobs in the best of circumstances and PEF members, without the proper training, should not be doing things like moving incarcerated individuals around inside facilities or delivering food to dormitories without security escorts."

PEF circulated a [Right of Refusal Fact Sheet](#) created by the Health & Safety Department that gave members a script for what to say if they were assigned a task that they thought placed them at risk of death or serious physical harm.

PEF staff also set up a [web form for members to report what was happening](#) to them and used the information to submit Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) complaints, as well as affidavits for a possible lawsuit against the State.

Within less than a week, late in the evening on Feb. 23, PEF entered into two Memorandums of Agreement with the state.

"Armed with the PESH complaints and affidavits many members submitted, the PEF Legal Department, with the assistance of

attorney Mark Richard and his firm, devised a legal strategy in advance and were prepared to file suit if negotiations were not productive," said President Spence.

The memorandums accomplished two primary goals:

- providing an overtime rate of 2.5 times a members' regular rate of pay for any hours worked starting at 7 a.m. Feb. 17, for both overtime eligible and ineligible employees at DOCCS, as well as community supervision employees working overtime to cover the deployment of coworkers. ([Read the MOA here.](#))
- outlining terms and conditions of employment during this crisis, including, among others, PEF-represented DOCCS nurses and medical staff will not have any contact with incarcerated individuals without a trained security escort; PEF parole officers will not be assigned to security assignments or duties inside prisons; and PEF-represented employees will, with limited exceptions, be provided with person alarms. ([Read the MOA here.](#))

On Feb. 25, PEF and the State signed a third MOA providing the same 2.5 times OT rate to OMH members who work in Corrections Based Operations at facilities. ([Read the MOA here.](#))

"This week has seen all impacted members perform with extraordinary professionalism during the most difficult of circumstances," President Spence said. "We can't recognize them enough for their continued courage and sacrifice. In addition, I'm incredibly proud of the staff at PEF who worked for a week straight to engage members, draft complaints, prepare lawsuits, and inform members what was going on."







# Solidarity, political action, education on display at Regions 1-5 Leadership Conference

By **KATE STICKLES**

It was a full house at the Statler Hotel at Cornell University Feb. 21-23 as leaders from Regions 1 through 5 descended on the venue for a leadership conference full of workshops, from organizing to health and safety to political action.

To start the event, PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio introduced the guest of honor.

“Some of you don’t know or don’t realize that the union movement is not just us in this room, it’s not just PEF,” she said. “We are a breadth of working people who stand up for each other and there is no one in New York State that exemplifies that fight better than our guest New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilentto.”

Cilentto thanked the leaders for stepping up and being active in their union.

“There are very few people outside of this room who really understand what goes into the job,” he said. “Maybe your immediate family. But outside that, people don’t really understand the 24-hour, seven-days-a-week commitment.”

Cilentto emphasized the importance of solidarity.

“When you are successful, when PEF is, the entire labor movement feeds off that success,” he said. “When we’re successful as a labor movement, when we are thriving as a labor movement, it’s a result of a few things. First, because we’re advocates, next, we participate, next, we educate ourselves on the issues. As a result of all those things, that’s how we make our voices heard.”

**REGIONS 1-5**



**MOVING TOGETHER**

Cilentto said 1 in 7 union members are from the state of New York – an impressive number.

“They really are impressive, but those numbers, in and of themselves, they’re useless, they are meaningless, and they are worthless,” he said. “Unless all of us are working off the same page, working out of the same playbook, coordinating public sector, private sector, building trades, upstate, downstate.”



The power of solidarity and working together, he said, have led to some victories over the last few years: fixes to Tier 6 of the State pension plan, workers' compensation for extreme mental and psychological stress, bonuses for healthcare workers, and farmworker legislation, to name a few.

### **Political action breeds success**

VP DiAntonio led the workshop on political action, focusing on the structure and purpose of political action committees (PACs), the top issues in the state budget impacting PEF members, an overview of the legislative process, and where to find resources.

"I hear a lot of people asking, 'Why did we endorse this person?'" she said. "Or 'we only endorse Democrats.' As an organization, PEF has to look at the greater good, issues that affect our membership. So, while, individually, something might be important to me, it might not be a priority of the union. We have to look at it as an organization and what is going to advance our members' needs."

Leaders in attendance were told their local participation is vital.

"You live in these districts," DiAntonio said. "Elected officials need to hear from the people who elect them. They can hear from the Regional Coordinator, but that's just one person, one vote. But if they hear from a group of people, that's really important."

Last year, PEF gathered approximately 12,000 letters on Tier 6 advocacy. But, only about 500 on the union's opposition to HALT (Humane Alternatives to Long-term Solitary Confinement, which is a major flashpoint in the ongoing corrections' officers strike).

"That's because Tier 6 was an issue that resonated across different agencies, different constituencies," she said. "When we were fighting HALT, which PEF has been opposed to since it was introduced in 2019, we only got about 500 letters out of a union of 54,000 members. We all live in our own world with our blinders. If we don't fight for each other, we weaken our positions.

"You say, 'Well, that doesn't affect me,'" she said. "It affects your brothers and sisters. We all have an obligation to each other. And that's how political action works. When we talk about power, power comes from strength in numbers."

DiAntonio closed the discussion with a call to action.

"You are the best soldiers in your communities," she said, urging everyone in the room to take the issues to their legislators – and take as many people with them as they could. "They don't know what our jobs are. We have to educate them. You are ambassadors, not just of the union's business, but about the work you love."

### **Educating leaders**

PEF staff and PEF Membership Benefits Program vendors also gave conference attendees crash courses in how to facilitate new employee orientations; how to leverage their power with health and safety; membership engagement and issue campaigns; how to use the PEF contract; what is COPE (Committee on Political Education); and maximizing membership benefits.

PEF Regions 1 to 5 Organizing Coordinator Libby Militello talked about how best to engage members and what information is important to share in new employee orientations. She covered contract provisions, Membership Benefits, and general union information, as well as what the contract guarantees about the union's access to new members. There are resources available to leaders conducting orientation here.

She also led a discussion on member engagement.

"An informed and engaged union membership is a strong membership," she said.

The workshop discussed the basics of member engagement, such as regular meetings and local committees. Using real examples of local issues and activities, attendees learned how to successfully organize conversations, identify effective issues to organize around, and build impactful campaigns.

PEF Health and Safety Training Specialist Josh Kemp focused on leveraging power with health and safety issues, providing leaders with an understanding of key health and safety rights, the role of Health and Safety Committees, when to utilize the Public Employees Safety and Health (PESH) process, and how to approach workplace safety issues strategically.

Conference attendees also learned how to tap into funding sources, brushed up on the labor/management and health and safety processes, and heard about lesser-known contract articles that may be relevant to local leaders and their members from PEF Director of Contract Administration Debra Greenberg.

Vendors that work with the [PEF Membership Benefits Program](#) provided information on the services they offer, including insurance options (disability, accident, and life insurance); financial and legal services (tools and resources for financial planning and legal assistance); everyday savings (discounts on gift cards, movie and sporting events, concerts, and attractions); and the new Family and Friends Day Cruise benefit.

Committee on Political Action (COPE) Coordinator Don Morgenstern discussed the importance of members taking an interest in issues decided in Washington and the federal budget, which can directly affect members on the job. He outlined ways for leaders to encourage their members to contribute to COPE to build PEF's political power.



PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio delivering testimony at Joint Legislative Hearing on Workforce Development on February 26.

# PEF to legislators: Act now to bolster the State workforce

By **NAJEE WALKER**

At a joint State budget hearing on Workforce Development Feb. 26 in Albany, PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio testified how the proposed Executive Budget can do more to attract and retain workers in state government.

"Recruitment and retention are a serious issue. It's been an ongoing issue, but it is now a complete crisis," Vice President DiAntonio told legislators. "We appreciate all the efforts on Tier 6 reform, but we need action."

DiAntonio told members of the committee that while overtime paid by the State to its workforce are soaring (\$1.2 billion last year), the hidden costs are the negative effects all that OT has on the lives of state workers who are overworked and unable to be with their families and loved ones.

"The agencies that pay out the majority of overtime will not come as a shock to you: DOCCS, OCFS, OMH and OPWDD. Seventy percent of all overtime work were in those settings and that trend continues," she said. "Chronic short staffing is unsustainable. Our members are at their breaking point, they are overworked, and the impact on morale is overwhelming. Excessive overtime mandates are commonplace because they are doing the jobs of other people."

"The safety of our members and the people we serve is PEF's top priority," DiAntonio testified. "At the end of the day, staff and clients have the same goal – do the work and get home safely to your family. Right now, staffing and resource levels do not provide ample opportunity to deliver the services needed to meaningfully reform the system. That, in turn, leaves too many staff and, at correctional facilities, incarcerated individuals vulnerable to violence and intimidation."





Lawmakers asked DiAntonio and her fellow panelists why the state cannot seem to hire and retain enough workers.

“To the state’s credit, they have brought in a lot of people, but what we’re seeing is they’re not staying in state service,” she said. “We have OCFS facilities where they bring people in and in their first week they are being mandated to work 25, 30, 40 hours straight and after being trained and all of the resources that go into that, they leave.”

The New York State Department of Civil Service has been working on hiring through NY HELPS, a program that waives exams in favor of expediting the hiring process. While PEF supports NY HELPS as a temporary fix, there are still issues with the program and PEF believes it does little to address attrition.

“Civil Service has promised us many changes, but we still have 12 regional testing sites that are not open yet,” said DiAntonio. “We still have a salary study that was funded two years ago that just started last month. And while we agreed that HELPS was a good band-aid, as we’re seeing in Washington, abandoning the merit and fitness system is not going to help New Yorkers on a long-term basis.”

[PEF’s submitted written testimony](#) highlights critical points where the state should do more to bolster the workforce, including Tier 6 reform, building capacity at the Civil Service Department, strengthening protections against bullying in the workplace and delivering equipment and technology to enhance safety at facilities where assault has been reported.

“We know that these conversations always boil down to cost, be we also must consider the other costs the state, municipalities and school districts are paying in overtime compensation, the civil service exam and onboarding costs, and the costs associated with training and re-training new staff,” PEF wrote in the testimony. “When you have a workforce that is experiencing this high level of turnover, these are real costs.”

The Legislature will consider all the budget testimony they’ve received from various stakeholders and work together with the Governor to finalize the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 budget by April 1.

PEF members are encouraged to [send pre-written letters to their local legislators](#) in support of PEF’s budget priorities.



Senator Jessica Ramos, Senator Robert Jackson and Assemblymember Harry Bronson at Joint Legislative Hearing on Workforce Development



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# PEF members visit State Capitol for annual Lobby Day

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF nurses and members from across the State visited the Capitol in Albany on March 4 to meet with legislators and discuss PEF’s budget priorities.

At each meeting, legislators were asked to sign on to proposals that would bolster the workforce where the state is lacking critical services, staffing and infrastructure.

One of the main proposals put forth by the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee and the membership is funding for SUNY Downstate and Upstate Medical Centers. Currently, there is a plan to allocate up to \$750 million to SUNY Downstate. However, as members of the community and Downstate staff have said, that it may not be enough to support the completion of critical renovation projects.

“We understand that part of the talks have been around reducing the capacity of the beds we have at SUNY Downstate, but we cannot allow that to happen if we are to continue as a teaching school and provide critical care,” said PEF’s Council Leader representing Downstate, Joan Rosegreen. “The medical nursing school, the research and the care are all symbiotic.”

PEF supports the round of funding put forth by the governor and is engaging at community hearings as the Downstate Advisory Board gathers input, but the “Brooklyn Needs Downstate” coalition – on which PEF plays a leading role – is asking for an additional \$250 million in capital funding to ensure Downstate can continue to deliver quality, life-saving care. Additionally, PEF is lobbying for \$450 million in funding for SUNY Upstate in Syracuse, where the emergency rooms are overcrowded.

“We treat all kinds of people at our hospital, including babies who are born addicted to substances, people with prenatal issues, and we see a lot of premature babies born prematurely who have to be admitted to the NICU. We’re running out of space,” said Registered

Nurse Rachel Amodio-Kopp, who works at SUNY Upstate and serves on the PEF Executive Board. “On any given night we have approximately 75 people in the emergency room and only 38 rooms. People are lining the halls, and the waiting rooms are at capacity.”

PEF nurses also urged lawmakers to oppose New York’s entry into the Nurse Licensure Compact. While New York State and other states have sometimes used the compact to help ease staffing shortages, PEF believes that the compact would have a negative impact on the standards of care put in place by the state and do nothing to attract new nurses or retain existing ones.

“We understand that there is a shortage of employees at the state level, but that doesn’t mean we want to see our standards watered down,” said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio. “We believe that New York State nurses are well-educated and have some of the best regulations and standards to protect our patients and take care of people.”

PEF believes that, instead of the compact, the legislature should support a preceptorship program. Preceptors are clinicians who provide new nurses the professional support and hands-on training they need to excel in the profession. PEF continues to support bill that would incentivize nurses to serve as preceptors.

The bill (S.2067/A.2230) would amend the tax law to provide an income tax credit for health care professionals who participate in preceptorship programs.

“A preceptor program would not only give incoming nurses the opportunity to learn from some of the best nurses we have, but it would also foster a sense of community while giving them the training they need,” said DiAntonio.



"This is a retention issue more than anything," said PEF Statewide Nurses Committee Co-Chair Vincent Cicatello, from Buffalo. "When people are more energized about being preceptors, we believe that they will do a better job shaping the new nurses. This could go a long way with recruiting and retention efforts. A good preceptorship program would incentivize and energize more nurses to join the program."

### DOCCS issues top of mind

In her Executive Budget proposal, Gov. Kathy Hochul once again asked the Legislature for permission to close up to five prisons in the next year with only 90-days notice. Current state law requires that at least 12-months notice be provided to DOCCS employees. PEF is concerned that with the ongoing situation at State correctional facilities, additional prison closures without a clear timeline and transparent plan, present a clear risk to the health and safety of PEF members.

"The situation right now is horrible, and even though our members are not involved in any strikes going on, they do not feel safe," said DiAntonio. "We urge policymakers and advocates on all sides to sit down together and discuss how to make our correctional system safe for both incarcerated individuals and the staff who support them. Absent a real plan to address the universal concerns around health and safety, we are going to see retention decrease further with these kinds of closures."

"Right now, my institution is doing well with staffing," said PEF nurse Jeff Taylor, who works at Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, N.Y. "However, if my facility were to close, then we could potentially lose a third of the nurses who are working in the area. That has ripple effects on the community. It can already be hard to prepare for a closure within a year, but it would be even harder to do so within 90 days."

### Health & Safety of members is paramount

As safety concerns rise, PEF members urged legislators to support bills that increase penalties for assaulting public employees, and to authorize the use of body scanners at OMH, OPWDD, OCFS and OASAS facilities to screen for weapons that could be used in workplace assaults.

"We are really hoping to see some increased protections at these facilities, especially at facilities like the one in Buffalo where there was an attack on our members," said PEF Interim Downstate Field Director Debbie Egel, who has a nursing background. "We believe that adding body scanners and supporting legislation that increases penalties for assaults on public employees are steps that demonstrate policymakers take worker safety seriously."

During about a dozen meetings with lawmakers throughout the day, PEF also urged them to continue to focus on other budget items, like fixing Tier 6, which most legislators were eager to agree with as retention becomes the primary issue impact state services.

"Most of the nurses who are being hired stay for at most two years," said Egel. "They take their knowledge and go to the private sector where the benefits are better."

PEF will continue to push these and other priorities as budget negotiations continue between the governor and the legislature. The final State budget is due April 1. Members who have not yet sent digital letters supporting PEF's priorities are urged to do so! [Just click here to get started.](#)



Photographs from the annual PEF Legislative Reception, held at the Albany Hilton on March 4. Governor Hochul stopped by to thank PEF members for stepping up during the corrections strike and conversations were had with dozens of State lawmakers about PEF's budget priorities.

# PEF member's daughter is this year's Celebrity Child for Variety Kids Telethon

By KATE STICKLES



Evelynn is the Celebrity Child for this year's Variety Kids Telethon.

When Evelynn was born in the spring of 2021, her parents had no idea that seven short months later their daughter's doctors would find a tumor sitting inside her spine, shaped like a dumbbell with large masses protruding from each end. And shortly after, the family would receive a devastating diagnosis – neuroblastoma, a form of childhood cancer.

Evelynn is the daughter of Jilynn, a PEF member who works at the Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center (PEF Division 167). She is also this year's Celebrity Child for the [63rd Annual Variety Kids Telethon](#). She and her family will be part of the 6 to 11 pm. March 8 program on WGRZ, Channel 2, in Buffalo, and the 10 a.m. to 8 a.m. March 9, with labor hour from 1 to 4, on WBBZ, Channel 5 and streaming online.

"She is a spitfire, she is amazing," said PEF Division 167 Council Leader Patricia Moran. "She's funny. She's kind. She's loving. She's modest. And she loves her baby brother!"

Evelynn was treated at Oishei Children's Hospital and Roswell Park Pediatric Clinic. She successfully completed eight rounds of chemotherapy and has been in remission for more than two years.

With the tumor's location, Evelynn has a spinal cord injury and partial paralysis, but she doesn't let it stop her. She continues to

push forward, participating in physical therapy four times per week through the Robert Warner Center, The Motion Project, and school-based physical therapy. She has made a tremendous amount of progress, including being able to walk for short periods of time with assistive equipment.

If Jilynn had to describe her daughter with one word – it would be resilient.

"Her ability to overcome the major obstacle of beating cancer and then continuing to overcome all the obstacles of her spinal cord injury just amazed us," Jilynn said.

The family hopes the telethon helps them share Evelynn's story and raise money for other children facing illness or disability.

"It has been a privilege and an honor to be able to share Evelynn's story in an effort to raise funds for multiple agencies that have helped us on our journey of hope," Jilynn said. "Evelynn has been the face and the voice of the telethon. It's been amazing to be a part of that. Being able to turn around something horrible that happened to our daughter to something good has given all this some purpose."

For Jilynn, the telethon is also an opportunity to instill good values in her daughter.

"I think one of the reasons we wanted to do this is for Evelynn to be part of something bigger than herself," she said. "Using our story to advocate and help others is a way of hoping and moving forward."

The telethon, the longest running, locally produced telethon in the nation, has been serving the needs of Western New York's sick, disabled, and disadvantaged children for more than 80 years.

"We are really lucky we have the best cancer institution in the country, Roswell Park; the best children's hospital, Oishei; and the best psychiatric center, Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center," Moran said.

Anyone can donate to the telethon. Just visit the [Variety Kids Telethon website](#) to get started.





## PEF, AFT, NYSUT rally to 'Protect Our Kids'



AFT President Randi Weingarten addresses the rally at West Capital Park in downtown Albany.

PEF leaders and members joined AFT President Randi Weingarten, NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento and hundreds of NYSUT (New York State United Teachers) members on March 4 for a rally outside the State Capitol to "Protect Our Kids" from federal cuts to education.

Speakers at the rally pointed out that proposals on the table by the federal government to gut the Department of Education would devastate schools and communities. Classrooms will be overcrowded, special education, mental health and family support services will be reduced, and all taxpayers will end up paying more to support schools in their communities.

PEF President Wayne Spence passionately recalled the support his daughter, now 25 and with a master's degree in accounting, received from first to fifth grade to help with her reading skills.

"It was hard to get the assistance and have somebody work with her," he said. "That was Title I (federal funding). And I am glad that Title I was there to fund those services. We need to make sure we pay it forward and do not let them take back what we have had."

The Albany rally was one of hundreds across the country organized by AFT local unions. The campaign to "Protect Our Kids" is ongoing and PEF members looking to get involved can find ways to contribute at [www.aft.org/ProtectOurKids](http://www.aft.org/ProtectOurKids).



President Spence poses for a selfie with two members who came out in solidarity during their lunch hour.



PEF, UUP, CSEA and members from other unions joined with community members and federal workers to protest the staffing decisions made by the Department of Government Efficiency.”

# PEF joins with Federal Unionists Network fighting to “Save Our Services”

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Federal employees have been responding with anger and action to cuts, layoffs, and other measures being taken by the Trump Administration’s “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE), which is run by unelected billionaire Elon Musk.

Musk and President Trump claim that DOGE’s efforts focus on eliminating government waste and fraud. To date, more than 20,000 workers have been fired due to DOGE’s efforts, across several agencies, including the USDA, the Department for Veterans’ Affairs, the Education Department, and more.

The Federal Unionists Network (FUN) is a conglomerate of workers who have united to call for an end to the practice of cutting and potentially dismantling critical civil services that Americans rely on and putting the livelihoods of career civil servants at risk.

On Feb. 19, FUN organized protests across the United States to demand an end to the cuts and “Save Our Services.” PEF, along with other unions like UUP, AFGE and CSEA, joined FUN for a rally at the Leo O’Brien Federal Building in Albany, N.Y.

Adam Pelletier, the organizer for the Save Our Services rally in Albany, said FUN has been busy gathering members inside and outside of the federal workforce for some time, but the recent threats have seen more people join the cause.

“We are just sort of coming out of the shadows as an organization,” he said. “We’re at about 500 strong so far. That includes the dozens and dozens of federal employees who have been fired for no reason other than they have a job that somebody doesn’t like.”

Union leaders, community members, and workers were all invited to speak during the rally, including PEF Vice President Bruce Giddings, who reaffirmed PEF’s stance on the issue, stating that civil service matters for New York State and for our nation and that the people who count on PEF members also count on federal employees and deserve access to the quality services they provide.

“There is more to the U.S. Constitution than just the first two amendments,” Giddings said. “Our republic kicked the king to the curb a long time ago. The U.S. Constitution vests the power to establish and fund programs with the people acting through their elected representatives in the U.S. Congress.

“Neither the President nor his appointee, Mr. Musk, have the constitutional authority to suspend spending or eliminate programs or agencies unilaterally and without congressional approval,” he said. “This blatant misuse of power must end now.”

Mickey Dobbin, a PEF Executive Board member and Steward and Treasurer for PEF Division 194 at the New York State Museum, believes that this is the greatest assault on the working class in recent history.

“The Federal Civil Service is only the first of their targets,” Dobbin said. “We, as state workers, will be next. Municipal workers, county workers, we are all their targets, and it is not just about our jobs, it is about our missions. We have to stop this here and now.”



Albany's Save Our Services rally ended with a call to action, to continue to spread the word and fight back against the culling of jobs and services across the country.

"Rallies are good, and we will continue to do as many of them as we need to, but we cannot lose sight of why we're here," said Pelletier. "We need to keep calling and emailing and shouting until we do not need to anymore and then keep doing it anyways. So much depends on what we do here and now."

There are a variety of ways PEF members can be heard on the issue.:

- You can use [this service from the NYS AFL-CIO](#) to have your cell phone auto-connected to your U.S. congressional representative.
- You can [send a letter using Action Network](#) to tell your New York Representative to not cut the amount of federal dollars used to support public programs.

Or you can dial directly and enter your zip code to be connected to your elected representative: (866) 426-2631.

PEF President Wayne Spence is also holding a Telephone Town Hall on March 6 at 6 p.m. to inform all members about what the union is doing and how they can help. The personal phone numbers of members will be dialed at that time. If you need to change your number, you can register, [here](#).





OPWDD PEF member Thomas Galla shares the Look Beyond project with 2023 State Fair attendees through a sticky note activity.

# March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

By **KATE STICKLES**

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is a month-long observance that brings attention to the unique experiences of individuals with developmental disabilities. It's a time to celebrate their achievements, advocate for their rights, and promote understanding and inclusivity within society.

Thousands of PEF members work around New York State at the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), delivering critical care and services to people with developmental disabilities.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month was established by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1987.

"Americans are becoming increasingly aware that such disabilities need not keep individuals from realizing their full potential in school, at work or at home, as members of their families and of their communities," he stated in his proclamation on Feb. 26, 1987. "I urge all Americans to join me in according to our fellow citizens with such disabilities both encouragement and the opportunities they need to lead productive lives and to achieve their full potential."

## Reducing stigma

In 2023, New York's OPWDD launched its "Look Beyond My Developmental Disability" campaign to combat the stigma that people with developmental disabilities face in their daily lives.

"The "Look Beyond" anti-stigma public awareness campaign uses public and online forums, social and mass media, and radio and print advertising to educate the public about developmental disabilities and highlight the positive contributions of people with developmental disabilities to their state and their communities," according to a press release announcing the launch.

"Many people with developmental disabilities still experience pre-conceived stereotyping and discrimination in various aspects of life, including access to housing, employment, and medical care, which can lead to poor physical and mental health outcomes as well as social exclusion and isolation," it said.

Learn more about OPWDD's Look Beyond campaign [here](#).

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*If you are a PEF member working at OPWDD, and you want to share a story about the work you do with the developmentally disabled population, please reach out to Editor Kate Stickles at [Communicator@pef.org](mailto:Communicator@pef.org).*



# Doris Ann (“Dee”) Dodson, 1950-2025

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By **NAJEE WALKER**



Doris Ann Dodson was a long time PEF member, former Region 12 Coordinator, Legislative Assistant, Nurse Coordinator and member of the Statewide Nurses Committee. “Dee” to her colleagues and friends, she served as the union leader on Long Island from 2003 to 2011 and after leaving union elected office, she continued to serve members as PEF’s Legislative Assistant and later Nurse Coordinator until 2020.

Dodson practiced nursing at SUNY Stony Brook University Hospital, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in nursing and a master’s in human resource management.

Dodson’s union activism often placed her at the forefront of fights for workers in danger of losing benefits or their jobs. In 2009, she worked hard to block mandatory flu vaccinations issued by the New York State Department of Health, arguing that such regulations should come from the State Legislature, not the health department.

“This is about our right to make a choice,” said Dodson in 2009. “Why do certain health care workers have fewer rights than everyone else? Vaccination for influenza should be voluntary with emphasis on educational campaigns.”

She was honored on March 1, 2013, in the 3rd Senate District by former State Senator Lee Zeldin. Alongside others, Dodson’s contributions to her community were celebrated as part of Black History.

In addition to being a highly active PEF member and leader, Dodson was a member of the Central Islip School Board from 2012-2014 and was involved with the Brightside Civic Association, the Coalition of Good Neighbors Civic Association and the Islip branch of the NAACP.

Doris Ann Dodson passed away on February 23, 2025, at the age of 74. She will be remembered by friends and family on Sunday, March 9, at AMVETS Post #76 from 2-6 p.m., in Bay Shore.



# Blast from the Past: New York sought to cut public worker jobs

By **NAJEE WALKER**

In 2025, the federal government is firing workers and slashing services in what they say is an attempt to shrink the size of government spending and save money for the country and taxpayers. Thirty years ago, New York State politicians tried to do much the same thing.

In 1995, Governor George Pataki proposed a multi-year tax-cut that put state workers and essential services in the crosshairs. The governor's proposal aimed to reduce the state workforce by 5% with many services centered around infectious diseases, civil engineers, and research scientists under threat. It also meant the potential closure of hospitals serving patients with mental health needs. The tax cuts benefited wealthy New Yorkers, while providing little financial relief to middle income families.

In response, state workers, community leaders, educators and even their students rallied and protested the threat to jobs and the services public employees provide to everyday New Yorkers.

Then PEF President James Sheedy launched a "Fight Back" campaign, which focused on delivering the truth about the Executive Budget proposal.

"PEF's analysis shows that virtually every proposed cut in every state agency will produce a similar result: less service to the public,

more risk to public safety and a shift to more costs to local property taxpayers," said Sheedy. "Every PEF member must be part of the 'truth-in-budgeting' lobbying effort."

In the end, PEF and its allies saved a lot of jobs and services. Several positions at the State Education Department were saved, the State approved millions of dollars to keep its alcoholism-treatment facilities open, and continued to fund counseling programs for troubled youth.

"Our members and legislative staff did an incredible job of blunting state budget blows this year," said Sheedy at the time.

Gov. Pataki did succeed in cutting some budgets, but overall State spending rose by about 2 percent that year.

Today, PEF and its parent unions, AFT and SEIU, are engaging with citizens across the country to reveal the impact of proposed federal cuts on vital public services. If you're a PEF member who delivers services to New Yorkers who stand to be impacted by a reduction in federal funding at your agency, please get in touch via [Communicator@pef.org](mailto:Communicator@pef.org) so we can share your story.





## PEF in the News

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### **Public Employees Federation president: 'I understand why' prison workers are striking**

President Spence was a guest on [Spectrum News' Capital Tonight with Susan Arbetter](#) on Feb. 25 to talk about the prison strikes across the state and how the union is working hard to protect the health and safety of members. He also spoke about the importance of recognizing the unintended consequences of things like the HALT Act, which was meant to provide humane alternatives to solitary confinement for incarcerated individuals, but has made it difficult to control the prison population.

### **"Everybody's concerned with their safety"**

PEF Parole Officer Gina Lopez spoke to [Spectrum News in Rochester](#) on Feb. 27 about her experience working four 16-hour shifts inside Attica Correctional Facility to fill the gap when corrections officers walked off the job. She also spoke about the importance of recognizing the unintended consequences of things like the HALT Act, which was meant to be provide humane alternatives to solitary confinement for incarcerated individuals, but has made it difficult to control the prison population.



### **Conditions inside New York correctional facilities**

On Feb. 28, [North Country Public Radio](#) talked to PEF President [Wayne Spence](#) about what members told the union about the conditions they were and are working under during the strike.



### **'It's work that is dangerous': Deal reached to protect prison staff during corrections officer strike**

[ABC affiliate WKBW in Buffalo](#) interviewed [President Spence](#) on Feb. 25 about the agreements the union negotiated with the state to protect the health and safety of members inside and outside correctional facilities during strikes across New York.

### **Deal protects civilian staff, parole officers during correction officers' strike**

[In their Feb. 24 newscast, ABC affiliate WTEN in Albany](#) spotlighted [the PEF-negotiated deal with the state](#) to protect the health and safety of members working at DOCCS facilities. President Spence spoke on the measures the union has taken.

# PEF Scholarships available for members and their dependents

By **NAJEE WALKER**

With prices for everything from gas to eggs soaring across the country, finding ways to save a little extra money is critical for many families. PEF offers a variety of scholarships to members and their families to help ease the cost of education.

## Scholarships for members

If you are a member attending a college or university or a graduate student, PEF offers a few different avenues through your contract to seek reimbursement and increases in pay once you have a degree in hand.

For women who are currently active members, the **Jean DeBow Women in PEF Scholarship** offers \$1,000 to any active female PEF members who are pursuing accredited Post Secondary education in any field. The application can be found on the PEF [website](#) and the deadline for applying is May 1.

## Scholarships for dependents of members

Members of PEF Division 231 working at the Capital District Psychiatric Center who have a dependent seeking a college degree are eligible to apply for a PEF Division 231 scholarship.

The division will provide \$2,500 to scholarship winners for the current school year and the money will be distributed once winners are selected.

Members of Division 231 must fill out the [application](#) before the March 7 deadline and email their completed application to Division 231 Council Leader Donna Sherrycervantes at [Donna.Sherrycervantes@pef.org](mailto:Donna.Sherrycervantes@pef.org).

PEF Division 343 (Greene Correctional Facility in Coxsackie, N.Y.) is holding its second annual college scholarship contest. The contest will award one \$1,000 scholarship. Applicants must be a child or family member of an active PEF Division 343 member and a high school graduate or soon-to-be graduate enrolled in at an accredited New York State College for the Fall 2025 term as a freshman.

Members of Division 343 must complete the [application](#) and email it to Division 343 Secretary Christine Thompson at [Namena2@yahoo.com](mailto:Namena2@yahoo.com) with a copy to Council Leader Kathleen Pepper at [RSC90@aol.com](mailto:RSC90@aol.com). An essay and proof of enrollment must also be

submitted with the application. The subject line of the email should read **PEF Division 343 Scholarship Fall 2025**.

The deadline for the Division 343 Scholarship is July 7. A winner will be chosen and announced on July 21.

The Joseph Scacalossi Scholarship is a statewide PEF scholarship program offered to children, stepchildren or wards of an active, retired or deceased PEF member. It is offered to high school seniors or to college freshman.

Each year, 10 students are awarded \$1,000 annually for four years to defray the cost of their education.

The application can be found on the PEF [website](#), and the deadline for applying is March 15.

*Editor's Note: Division councils with scholarship information to publicize are encouraged to email [Communicator@pef.org](mailto:Communicator@pef.org) with details. We will share them in The Communicator and on our Scholarship [page](#).*





## 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](http://www.pef.org/careers-at-pef)



# Stay engaged and informed as the federal government makes drastic cuts

By **JIM CARR**

My fellow Retirees and Union Siblings, we are in uncharted times! I have just returned from Washington, D.C., where I attended an AFT Retirees Program & Policy Council as PEF's Representative. We had a three-day meeting where we discussed all the chaos and confusion coming out of the newly elected administration. We all want a better future for ourselves regardless of how we voted in the last election! I for one didn't vote for gutting and slashing government programs under the broad pretense of cutting waste and fraud. The American people didn't vote for chaotic and reckless attacks on federal workers, unions, kids, blue states, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, a reduction in research funding for cancer, S.N.A.P. for kids or Pell grants for education, and the list goes on and on! Our focus was on what we can do in our local chapter. The first thing I'm doing is sharing the information below about a lawsuit AFT filed last month.

**SUIT FILED: In New Challenge, Retirees, Unions Seek to Block DOGE's Unprecedented, Unlawful Social Security Data, Power Grab**

*AFSCME, Alliance for Retired Americans, AFT Challenge DOGE's Access, Executed by Unconfirmed, Acting Official, to Confidential, Private Data of Hundreds of Millions of Americans*

*Suit filed on heels of SSA Acting Head's Departure Amid Concerns about DOGE Access to Data*

**Baltimore, MD** — In a lawsuit filed on Feb. 21, 2025, retirees and unions sued to halt DOGE's unprecedented, unlawful seizure of personal, confidential, private and sensitive data from the Social Security Administration, without any express authority. Such access has been granted by an unlawful acting official, installed at SSA with disregard for the rules governing such appointments.

The Social Security Administration maintains the financial data, employment information, medical data, and personal addresses of millions of Americans. The lawsuit alleges that such seizure by DOGE is prohibited by and in violation of the many protections Congress and the Executive Branch have in place to protect against such data mining and misuse. These include the Internal Revenue Code, the Privacy Act, the Federal Information Systems Modernization Act, the E-Government Act, and the Administrative Procedure Act.

"The Social Security Administration holds the financial future of millions of Americans within its doors," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. "Elon Musk is an unelected billionaire who has no right to access the benefits working people have paid into. We won't allow him to undermine the promise that we can all retire with dignity one



day; that if we ever get hurt on the job and are unable to work, we won't go hungry. Social Security insurance belongs to taxpayers, not Musk — no matter how rich he is. We must stop him from gaining unfettered access to our future."

"Social Security is a sacred trust between the American people and the government," said Richard Fiesta, executive director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, a national grassroots advocacy organization. "Seniors must be able to trust that the Social Security Administration will protect and safeguard their most personal financial and health data. We urge the court to act and ensure the American people's data is not misused. We cannot risk the catastrophic consequences should this very personal data fall into the wrong hands."

"Social Security is based on the promise that if you work hard and play by the rules you can retire with dignity and grace," said AFT President Randi Weingarten. "Everyone who receives Social Security has contributed to it, and they expect the government to uphold its end of the bargain. Elon Musk is breaking that basic bond of trust by illegally raiding people's private data for his own ends. The financial future of hundreds of millions of Americans has essentially been hijacked by an addled and unelected billionaire intent on laying waste to the accounts working people have spent their lives building up. We're suing to stop him in his tracks."

"Americans across the country should be able to have confidence that the government safeguards their data. Yet, over the course of the last month, we have seen a group of unappointed and unvetted individuals disregard the privacy of hundreds of millions of Americans," said Democracy Forward President & CEO Skye Perryman. "We are honored to represent retirees and worker representatives to protect the privacy and security of such critical data."

You can read the full complaint [here](#). Please continue to stay engaged and informed as the federal government continues to act in unprecedented ways. Also, a reminder that it is State budget negotiating season and [PEF has a packet of digital letters](#) you can send to your local lawmakers to support the union's priorities, including another attempt to cease paying the Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount to some retirees.



# Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

**SIGN NOW!**

# Your fellow members need your leave donations

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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.

Maritza Echevarria is an ICM at Bronx Psychiatric Center in the Bronx.

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.

Ilianna Fermin is a Social Worker at Bronx Psychiatric Center in the Bronx.

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 Mazurkiecicz 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,.

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.



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](mailto:communicator@pef.org), or call 518-785-1900.







**February 22, 2025**

PEF leaders from Regions 1 through 5 gathered for a leadership conference February 21 to 23 in Ithaca. Clockwise from top left: Organizing Coordinator Libby Militello discusses member engagement and organizing; a group shot of Region 2; group shots of Region 3 (top) and Region 1 (bottom); a member speaks with Women's Committee Chair Michele Rosello; group shot of Region 4; group shot of Region 5; group shot of Region 4; NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento; and group shot of Regional Coordinators and Vice President Randi DiAntonio.



**February 28, 2025**

PEF Division 237 hosted a membership meeting at the Oxford Veterans Home to discuss budget priorities, political action, and general union updates.



**February 28, 2025**

As the corrections officers strike continues for a second weekend, PEF members are visiting facilities around the State to deliver water and food to members who continue to do good work inside and outside facility walls. This is Albion CF in PEF Region 3.

**February 28, 2025**

PEF VP Bruce Giddings joined The Greater Capital Region Building and Construction Trades Council of the AFL-CIO outside of Hudson Valley CC in solidarity to put the pressure on for a Project Labor Agreement with the school.





**February 27, 2025**

Division 245 hosted a membership meeting for NYS Dept. of Labor PEF members at Hanson Place in Brooklyn with Council Leader Erik Ruiz and Executive Board Member Scarlett Ahmed.

They celebrated a recent successful reallocation for investigators in the Labor Standards unit, an effort many years in the making. Thank you to PEF Field Rep Robert Wright and to PEF organizer Darryl Stevenson for their support.

**February 27, 2025**

PEF members at the Rockland Psychiatric Center stopped by to hear about the union's Stop Workplace Violence campaign, in addition to all the other latest union news and benefits from PEF VP Darlene Williams, Regional Coordinator Gabriela Franklyn and staff from the PEF Membership Benefits Program, PEF Organizing and Field Services.





### February 20, 2025

PEF members at the Capital District Psychiatric Center held a membership meeting, hearing about the union's workplace violence campaign, in addition to all the other union news and benefits from PEF VP Bruce Giddings, Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger, and Nurse Organizer Nora Higgins, as well as their division council.

### February 19, 2025

PEF Division 405 (Parks & Recreation) held a membership meeting in NYC. Thanks to the leaders and members who attended!





## Letters to the Editor

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

## We want to hear from you!

Send your letters to to [thecomunicator@pef.org](mailto:thecomunicator@pef.org). Please include your name and location. Letters may be published in upcoming issues of *the Communicator*.

