

Vol. 43

The
COMMUNICATOR

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PEF ramps up its
stop workplace
bullying, toxic
workplace campaign

Table of Contents

The President's Message	3
Executive Board approves budget, meets Contract team, discusses DOCCS strike and puts pressure on OMH to stop workplace violence	4
Next steps for PEF members in the DOCCS crisis	8
PEF monitoring DOCCS' decision to grant early parole	10
AFT hosts webinar on measles outbreak for educators, health care professionals	11
PEF joins thousands of union members for Stop the Cuts march in NYC	12
PEF Telephone Town Hall explores impact of federal cuts on state services	14
Deadline extended for SUNY Downstate Advisory Board recommendations	16
PEF hosts reception for international women of labor	17
New York's 58-year-old Taylor Law protects public sector unions	18
PEF leaders talk State Museum, staffing needs with local publication	19
PEF members step up to become certified OSHA trainers	20
Newly minted PEF OSHA trainers share what it means to them	21
Further your education at school of labor, urban studies	22
STEM Incentive Program Now Open for New York High School Seniors	23
PEF in the News	25
Members need your leave donations	28
Photo Highlights	29

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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



Signs of Spring at PEF: April contract money and a giant inflatable bull!

The PEF Executive Board met March 27 and 28 in Albany with a [full agenda](#), from approving a balanced budget for this fiscal year to discussing looming federal funding cuts and their potential impact on members and services, to entertaining a vote of no confidence in Office of Mental Health Commissioner Ann Marie Sullivan for failing to act in the wake of violence at state psychiatric facilities.

We also debuted the union's newest tool in our workplace bullying toolkit – an inflatable 20-foot-tall angry red bull that we can deploy across the state to draw attention to bullying and workplace violence. It's a striking symbol of our commitment to this fight against toxicity and violence at state agencies and it's sure to get noticed by the media! Stay tuned to our PEF social media accounts ([Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), and now, [Bluesky](#)) for a naming contest and a chance for members to tell us where the bull should stop first as it travels across the State.

Not all of April brings showers – it is also when [several increases and awards](#) will appear in many of your paychecks. In addition to the 3% across-the-board raises included in your contract, many can expect to see performance awards and advances, a second \$600 Higher Education Differential, and location pay increases. Your newly announced Contract Team will continue to work hard to assure you are rewarded for the professional jobs you do.

In our [Labor History column](#), we share the intricacies of New York's "Taylor Law," which, in part, prohibits public-sector unions from going on strike. The law complicated the recent wildcat strike by corrections' officers at DOCCS, the fallout from which we continue to monitor for impacts on our members.

I also encourage you to download the new PEF mobile app. It's one more way to stay informed and engaged with your union. You will need your Member Identification Number (MIN) and password. Download instructions can be found at www.pef.org/app.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence

Executive Board approves budget, meets Contract team, discusses DOCCS strike and puts pressure on OMH to stop workplace violence

The PEF Executive Board met for the first time in 2025 on March 27 and 28 in Albany. The board approved the union's budget for the next fiscal year, welcomed the new Contract Team, and discussed mobilizing to fight potential cuts to federal funding, which will impact the services PEF members provide.



New Executive Board members sworn-in

Brooke Bosch from OPWDD Taconic DDSO, Patricia O'Toole from Helen Hayes Hospital, Sametta Shaw-Lipiec from OPWDD Central NY DDSO, Scott Wendt from DOT in Syracuse and Gina Corona from OMH Hutchings PC were sworn-in to begin their three-year terms. Also sworn-in was new Region 5 Coordinator Scott Staub.

Passing the Budget

PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue presented to the executive board a balanced budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26, which funds the union from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026. The new budget reflects an increase in revenue as the State continues to hire employees who are part of a PEF bargaining unit.

"Total dues have increased by about \$2.6 million as we have experienced a number of new members thanks in part to the efforts of our organizing team," said Secretary-Treasurer Donahue.

With an increase in dues, there were also increases in some spending. PEF is gearing up for contract negotiations this year and has added a line in the budget to address upcoming expenditures surrounding travel, meetings, and other needs for the contract team.

Additionally, PEF is hiring for several new positions, including senior field representatives in New York City, Western New York and Albany, as well as two multi-regional field representatives. (Check out all open jobs on the Careers at PEF page.)

The Executive Board voted to add an amendment to the budget that would increase meal allowance rates for all regions. For regions 1 through 9, breakfast, lunch and dinner allowances are now \$15, \$23, and \$50, respectively. For Regions 10 through 12, those allowances are \$20, \$28, and \$60.

The largest expenditure in the budget is devoted to union leave, staff salaries and benefits, as well as expenses for committees, regional meetings and the annual PEF Convention. The total change in spending from the 2024-25 amended budget to the 2025-26 proposed budget is about \$2 million.

The board approved both the changes in meal allowances as well as the budget.

Remembering Dee Dodson

PEF President Wayne Spence led the board in a moment of silence to remember Doris Ann "Dee" Dodson, a PEF Retiree who passed away on February 23, 2025. Dodson was a long time PEF member and former Region 12 Coordinator in Long Island. She also served on the Statewide Nurses Committee and was employed for a time as PEF's Nurse Coordinator.



Her advocacy put her at the front of several fights for the union, where she was instrumental in convincing President Spence to become an activist.

"Dee really brought me into the union," said President Spence. "I met her at a meeting where parole officers were voting to decertify and break away from PEF. I had no love for this union. But Dee convinced me that things take time and instead, I became a steward. She was a true mentor to me."



Last month, Dodson received a posthumous proclamation from State Senator Robert Jackson and the New York State Senate recognizing her contributions to PEF and her advocacy on behalf New York State workers.

The 2026 Contract Team greets the executive board

With the 2023-2026 Contract set to expire April 1, 2026, PEF President Spence has assembled a team to negotiate a successor contract. PEF Vice President Darlene Williams returns as Contract Chair, along with Director of Contract Administration Debra Greenberg. Labor attorney Mark Richard will serve as chief negotiator.

The PEF Contract team is:

- Scarlett Ahmed, a Supervising Labor Services Representative from the Department of Labor;
- Theresa Ash, a Speech-Language Pathologist from the School for the Blind;
- Jordan Blatz, a Nursing Supervisor from Roswell Park;
- Theresa Burke, a Team Lead Registered Nurse 2 from Roswell Park;
- Vincent Cicatello, a Registered Nurse 2 from Buffalo Psychiatric Center;
- Conrad Davis, a Tax Auditor 1 at the Department of Taxation and Finance;
- George Howard, an Information Technology Specialist 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services;
- Bruce Jagroop, an Occupational and Environmental Specialist at Roswell Park;
- Chris Jordan, an Assistant Engineer for the Department of Transportation;
- Maureen Kozakiewicz, a Public Safety Grants Representative 3 from the Department of Motor Vehicles;
- Tanya Oliver, a Teacher 4 at DOCCS
- Shari Parsons, a Special Education Assistant for the School of the Deaf;
- Cathy Sawyer, a Special Education Assistant for the School of the Blind;
- Cynthia Walker, a Teaching and Research Registered Nurse 1 at SUNY Downstate; and
- William Wiley, a Special Education Assistant for the School of the Deaf

"I really want to make a point to hear from as many people as possible with this team, and travel to listen to the members," said Vice President Williams. "And I think we are really going to be able to deliver what is deserved for public servants."

The team begins training this month and will develop a contract survey to solicit input from all members. Any member who has suggestions about what they would like to see in the next contract can email 2026ContractSuggestions@pef.org.

Division Dissolution Vote

New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS) employs about 125 PEF members who are not assigned to a division. At the start of the board meeting, DFS was made up of three PEF divisions: 174, which covered the Banking Department, 260, which covered the Insurance Department for Downstate, and 268, which covered DFS Upstate.

Divisions Committee Chair Gwendolyn Culpepper informed the board that Divisions 174 and 260 had invalid and outdated Constitutions. They were based on old agencies which no longer exist since the banking and insurance departments merged into DFS 14 years ago.

"The committee reviewed these operating units and found that DFS does not consistently provide PEF with updated unit assignments, and this, along with internal disputes between Division 174 and 260 leadership, stalled efforts to resolve these problems," Culpepper told the board. "There has been no consistent way to define these operating units due to the many shared titles between the former banking department and the former insurance department."

A motion to dissolve the two divisions was made. The committee also recommended that a new "DFS Downstate" Division, 415, be created in place of the two dissolved divisions.

The Executive Board voted to approve the recommendation put forward by the committee. Members who were unassigned to a division will now have the opportunity to elect a new Division 415 Council and participate directly in local PEF activities.

PEF rolls out new app and social media account

PEF Communications and Membership Information Systems (MIS) introduced a new PEF mobile app to inform, engage and organize members. The app requires members to login using the same Member Identification Number (MIN) and password they use to access the PEF and PEF MBP websites. Download instructions can be found at www.pef.org/app.

PEF is also moving away from using X (formerly known as Twitter) and on to a similar app gaining popularity: Bluesky. Members are encouraged to follow the union on Bluesky @nyspef.bsky.social.

Revisiting the DOCCS Strike

As part of his President's Report, President Spence discussed the unauthorized strike by corrections' officers (COs) that began on Feb. 17 and lasted almost a month.

The strike resulted in the termination or resignation of more than 4,000 COs and had a profound impact on PEF members who work at DOCCS or for OMH in Corrections Based Operations.



President Spence invited members to speak about their experiences. Several thanked the union for fighting to protect their health and safety and negotiating Memorandums of Agreement that outlined what PEF members could and could not be asked to do during the strike.

"I appreciated all the help from staff when I called and had heated debates and asked what PEF was doing during this strike," said Robert Hodson, a senior parole officer based in Syracuse. "I had members who think because (parole officers) are so small we don't get enough union representation. After everything PEF has done, I now have members who are grateful for everything PEF did to represent them."

Sharon Lamb, who co-chairs the DOCCS Labor-Management Committee and works at Franklin Correctional Facility in Malone, said that even though her facility is typically well-staffed, the crisis tested their limits and pushed them in ways she couldn't have imagined.

"We had a lot of people volunteering and a lot of CSEA members also working alongside us to keep things running," said Lamb. "In the end we lost only 40 staff members, but we have now gained 100 new incarcerated individuals."



Vote of No Confidence

Members who work at the Office of Mental Health (OMH) also shared stories of abuse, mistreatment and overwork. Psychiatric facilities around the State have seen an increase in violent attacks by patients.

Many members of the executive board hoped to hear from OMH Commissioner Ann Marie Sullivan following multiple stabbings in April 2024 at Buffalo Psychiatric Center or following a violent assault of a PEF nurse at South Beach Psychiatric Center on Staten Island in September. But according to the members, Sullivan has not reached out or spoken to union leaders at all.

Following the discussion, the Executive Board unanimously approved a motion to draft a resolution for a vote of no confidence against Commissioner Sullivan. The board will consider the resolution when they next meet on June 12.

"The board spoke strongly and in unison because they are sick and tired of the lack of action by Commissioner Sullivan when it comes to addressing conditions in the agency that are leading to violent assaults against PEF members and other staff who work there," President Spence said.

Federal funding cuts loom

The PEF Legislative Department reported on its progress so far during the budget session. As of this writing, the Governor and Legislature have not yet come to terms on the State budget, but PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons said the union is hopeful it will contain some forward movement on union's top priorities.

"We have seen both houses include \$12 million in additional operating expenses for the State Museum, and up to \$150 million in capital for renovations," said Lyons. "Additionally, we have seen an additional \$250 million for SUNY Upstate to rehabilitate their emergency center and we have also seen a commitment for \$1 billion in capital money for SUNY Downstate to renovate – the real challenge is the major cut in federal support for New York that is coming down the tracks." "All of these items must be included in the final state budget agreement to become a reality," Lyons added.

On the federal level, PEF has been fielding phone calls and emails from members concerned about the future as the federal government continues to cut funding across agencies and services. Ultimately, these cuts will likely hurt all New Yorkers, including many PEF members and their families.

"The proposed federal budget cuts and the program cuts being made unilaterally under DOGE are too far reaching to not have an immediate negative impact on our members, our state and our economy -- Medicaid alone, New York State received \$56 billion for that," said Lyons. "Other healthcare programs, including the Affordable Care Act, \$15 billion. Social welfare programs, about \$5.5 billion. Funding for education, museums, libraries, \$4.4 billion," said Lyons. "There's \$9 billion we're getting this year under the Covid and American Relief Act money. The tail end of those monies, as they run out, is the money that the President is going after right now."





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Next steps for PEF members in the DOCCS crisis

By **NAJEE WALKER**

On President's Day, when stories of corrections officers across the state walking off the job started to circulate, no one could imagine the almost month-long struggle that lay ahead for PEF members.

"As soon as we heard about it, our first priority was the health and safety of our members," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "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 created a form for members to report all issues and filed those complaints with the Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) program within the State Department of Labor and used them as the basis to create affidavits for use in a possible lawsuit.

Threats of legal action resulted in the union signing multiple Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) with New York State. One [MOA established an overtime work rate of 2.5 times a members' regular rate of pay. Another outlined terms and conditions of employment during the crisis](#), protecting mainly PEF-represented DOCCS nurses and medical staff from having contact with incarcerated individuals without trained security. Additionally, the State agreed that parole officers would not be assigned to security details inside prisons and PEF employees would be provided with personal alarms.

The union received dozens of reports from PEF members who sacrificed time with their families to work mandated overtime during the crisis, with some clocking 16-hour days and others working for weeks at a time with no days off. A verbal agreement PEF reached with DOCCS gave parole officers a break by eliminating work or on-call assignments the weekend of March 8-9.



On a [Telephone Town Hall](#) on March 12, PEF members who work at DOCCS or the Corrections Based Operations of OMH were assured that union leadership and staff were doing all they could to make sure members were protected while negotiations to end the strike continued. Additionally, the MOAs signed in February were extended until April 9, 2025. PEF also urged members to continue to share their stories so that PESH could hear the complaints and the union could potentially take legal action.

A third MOA was signed by PEF President Wayne Spence and the Office of Employee Relations on March 13, which authorized the carry-over of vacation accruals in excess of 40 days beyond April 1, 2025. Members now have an additional year to use that accrued time. The new deadline is April 1, 2026.

Negotiations between the corrections officers' union, NYSCOPBA, and the State resulted in an agreement to end the strike on March 11. As part of the agreement, DOCCS agreed to pause parts of the HALT Act for 90 days, set up a process for scanning legal mail (designer drugs are being smuggled in using that mail), continue the 2.5 times temporary overtime pay for affected staff, and establish a committee to review HALT. HALT stands for Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement. It was signed into law by former Governor Andrew Cuomo on March 31, 2021.

President Spence has a seat on that committee, along with the following members:

- Lindsay Bonanza, a teacher at Marcy Correctional Facility;
- Steve Drake, a vocational supervisor at Mohawk Correctional Facility in Rome, and chair of the PEF/DOCCS Labor-Management Committee;
- Anne Jordan, an offender rehabilitation coordinator at Groveland Correctional Facility in Sonyea, N.Y.
- Jeff Taylor, a registered nurse at Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, N.Y.

"It is going to take months or years for DOCCS to recover. They are down almost 4,000 correctional officers and it takes 12 weeks to hire and train new ones," said President Spence. "PEF members can't become complacent and start doing the work of the officers. I will not stand for members working 16-hour days."

President Spence added on the call that reforming HALT will not be easy, especially since the criminal justice advocates who were so vocal about establishing it are not part of the committee. But the president committed PEF to those difficult conversations.

"When it comes to HALT, we have to talk about unintended consequences -- the death of inmates or protracted disfigurement of staff. There must be meaningful consequences for the actions of incarcerated individuals," he said.

PEF is continuing to solicit stories from members working at DOCCS so the union can keep the pressure on the State to improve working conditions. [Please fill out this form to submit yours.](#)



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Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III

PEF monitoring DOCCS' decision to grant early parole

By **KATE STICKLES**

Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III announced on March 31 a plan to move incarcerated individuals to “residential treatment outcount” status – meaning out of correctional facilities and into the community.

The move comes as prisons face a [staggering staffing crisis](#) in the wake of the wildcat strike by corrections’ officers across the state.

“This will have an enormous impact on our parole officers’ caseloads,” said President Wayne Spence. “PEF will be closely monitoring the situation as it unfolds to ensure our members are treated fairly and safely.”

To be eligible for early release, individuals cannot be serving an A-1 or A-2 non-drug offense, a class B through E violent felony offense, or a sex offense, and they must have an identified approved residence, which is not a shelter or social services placement.

Individuals must be within 15 to 110 days of an approved release date and must report to their assigned parole office for initial intake within 24 hours. Individuals will be supervised by their assigned parole officer at a COMPAS 1 supervision level, until the time of their release date. Upon reaching their release date, the individual will be evaluated and assigned to a caseload that is appropriate for their individual case and circumstances.

The memo calls for lists of eligible incarcerated individuals to be submitted to DOCCS no later than Noon on April 4.

AFT hosts webinar on measles outbreak for educators, health care professionals

By KATE STICKLES

If a student with measles enters a school gym, coughs, and then leaves – and two hours later 10 unvaccinated students enter that gym, nine of them are likely to contract measles.

That sobering thought came from Dr. Benjamin Hoffman, pediatrician and nationally recognized expert in child injury prevention and education who previously served as the American Academy of Pediatrics president, during a webinar on the measles outbreak hosted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) on March 24.

Hoffman joined Dr. Vin Gupta, a public health physician, professor, and regular health policy analyst for NBC News and contributor to the New York Times and CNN New Day, for the webinar focusing on what educators and health care professionals need to know about the measles outbreak to protect themselves, their children, their patients, and their community.

“Here we are again, talking about a preventable public health crisis that is disrupting schools, straining health care systems and putting our most vulnerable at risk. And this one we thought we had solved decades ago,” said Randi Weingarten, president of AFT. “Measles was eliminated in the U.S. in 2000. Today we’re seeing outbreaks in multiple states, and educators, school nurses and health care workers are once again left to pick up the pieces.”

Weingarten said misinformation and disinformation are rampant about vaccines and how the disease spreads. The webinar sought to educate listeners and emphasized facts over fear.

“Measles is not just a school issue,” she said. “It’s a public health issue. It’s a workforce issue. It’s a community issue. It’s all of our issues. Our members care for sick kids. They are really trying every single day to keep schools and hospitals safe and welcoming.”

Gupta explained the difference between measles and chicken pox, both of which present with rashes and both of which typically impact children, especially if they are not vaccinated.

“The key difference is that measles is highly contagious, and the sequence of symptoms is different,” he said. “Flu-like symptoms up to 7 to 14 days, then two to three days later, tiny white spots in the mouth. A day or two after that, red, round lesions start at the forehead and then go down the trunk and down to the extremities. Chicken pox presents on the belly and back.”

Vaccination is the best way to control outbreaks, Gupta said.

“There is no evidence at all that vaccines are unsafe or cause serious side effects,” he assured. “Common side effects are injection site reactions and muscle aches. There is no evidence of a link to autism.



Dr. Vin Gupta is shown in a screen grab from the webinar. You can view the full webinar [here](#).

It has been repeatedly studied over the last 30 years. The answer is no, it’s wrong, it’s false.”

Hoffman concurred.

“The science is settled,” he said. “More research has been done on measles than any other vaccine in history. It’s unimpeachable and beyond question. It is the same degree of misinformation as somebody who believed in a flat earth. Anybody who is marketing misinformation around measles and autism, they are trying to convince you the earth is flat.”

The misinformation is prevalent and dangerous, with people self-medicating with cod liver oil and vitamin A. People aren’t seeking care because they are led to believe these alternatives are effective, Gupta said.

PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio asked what people should do if they can’t find their records of vaccination. If you have a primary doctor, consult them, but if you don’t, Gupta shared a basic breakdown.

“If you were born before 1957, my advice is to just get a booster shot or if you want more data, get a measles titer assessment (an immunity test). Do it soon,” he said. “If you were born between 1957 and 1989, and you have no documentation of two shots, just get the measles shot. After 1989, there are usually no issues.”

You can view the webinar [here](#). AFT plans additional webinars with Dr. Gupta focused on public health issues throughout the year.





PEF joins thousands of union members for Stop the Cuts march in NYC

More than 50 PEF members and leaders participated in a Stop the Cuts march in New York on March 15, organized by the city's largest healthcare unions. Unions across the country have mobilized to deliver a message to Washington that eliminating federal funding for various State agencies and services will negatively impact Americans in every State. Here in New York, 38 percent of the State's \$242 billion budget comes from federal funding – everything from Medicaid to school lunches to highway maintenance.

While union leaders and our international affiliates, AFT and SEIU, are following developments closely, the total lack of transparency from the U.S. President and the so-called "Department of Government Efficiency" has limited our ability to fully understand what is happening in individual agencies, what programs have been frozen and which programs have been or will be eliminated.

As a result, it is critical that PEF members raise their voices and communicate their concerns. Here are a few ways to do that:

Contact your member of Congress at (202) 224-3121. Elected leaders listen to their constituents! Tell them how you feel, what concerns you, and what you're seeing on the ground at your job. Be specific and educate them about who is really being impacted or will be if the cuts impacting your agency happen.

Record video testimonials about why Washington needs to #StoptheCuts! PEF is asking members to deliver testimonials about the public services they deliver and what will happen if those services stop. If you'd like to participate, just record your video and tag @NYSPEF on [X](#) or [Instagram](#) or @PublicEmployeesFederation on [Facebook](#). You can also email Communicator@pef.org and a staff member will get back to you. We've gathered the videos we've received so far on [this page](#).

STOP *the* CUTS MARCH

Educate your friends, family and community about what you do! The misinformation spreading about the federal programs and services that PEF members administer is a real challenge. Too many New Yorkers don't understand that the vast majority of these vital federal programs and services keep residents out of poverty, help educate children with disabilities, provide unemployment benefits, keep our air and water clean, provide basic food assistance to those in need, or prevent fraud and abuse in earned benefit programs like Medicare and Social Security. The best way to counter false narratives is with the truth, so share yours with the people in your networks who will listen!





The march was well covered by the media. Here are some links to stories:

- [Spectrum News: New Yorkers rally against possible Trump cuts to vital programs](#)
- [amNY: Manhattan march sees thousands enraged by Medicaid cuts and federal layoffs](#)
- [WABC-TV: Protestors fill Lower Manhattan to push against tide of federal cuts](#)
- [Indivisible Instagram reel: "Die-in" staged outside NYSE to protest federal cuts](#)



PEF Telephone Town Hall explores impact of federal cuts on state services

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF held a telephone town hall on March 6 for members concerned about recent cuts to federal spending and the impact on State services and jobs. In the two months of the Trump Administration, thousands of jobs have been cut across various agencies, including the Department of Education, Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Institute of Health and more.

PEF President Wayne Spence said that he has received emails and phone calls from members who are concerned that these cuts to the federal civil service will soon hurt New Yorkers who work for the public sector.

"I have been hearing about some things that may affect public sector workers in New York, or PEF members, so I wanted to try to share as much as I can," said President Spence. "There are a lot of unknowns."

Also on the call were PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons and AFT Director of Public Employees Jennifer Porcari. In addition to the layoffs, Lyons said that cuts to the Department of Education in the U.S. House Budget Resolution seek to cut \$2 trillion from the U.S. Department and could harm New Yorkers at every level. For example, New York receives \$371 million in money for student breakfasts alone and \$1 billion for lunches. Services like these are administered by civil servants, often PEF members.

"New York State receives about \$1.5 billion for local education agencies that connect Title I students with programming," said Lyons. "There's another \$2 billion in Pell Grants that go to students for college education. Our members administer many of these programs. Really any entity that processes federal dollars for a benefit for students, our members are going to be impacted by any cuts there."

PEF members at the School for the Deaf and the Blind may also see cuts and reductions.

"At the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind, PEF members are actually the teachers and the support staff," said President Spence. "Those are considered Title I schools and will be impacted."

In the same way, agencies that assist children with mental health care and with managing disabilities, such as OMH, OPWDD, and the Office of Children and Family Services, also benefit from having Title I-funded programs and could be directly impacted.

Medicaid services could be on the line as well. Medicaid accounts for a large chunk of New York State's budget, about \$56 billion.

"One of the reasons SUNY Downstate is in trouble is because it's not getting a fair share of Medicaid reimbursements," said President Spence. "If Medicaid is going to get cut, that means the Department of Health, that means the SUNY Hospitals, SUNY Upstate, Stony Brook, Downstate—those nurses, and potentially the nurses who work in the Office of Mental Health—they are going to be impacted."

PEF is also expecting cuts to the National Institutes of Health, which would deal a blow to public universities and research institutions where important work on things like cancer treatment and more are being done.

"Nationally, what we stand to lose is about \$48 billion that is injected into local economies through research. There's a reason that we lead the world in excellent scientific research," said AFT's Porcari. "Much of this is done at public universities and public institutions, like Wadsworth (in Albany) and the Roswell Cancer Center (in Buffalo)."

The Wadsworth Laboratory employs many PEF members and during the height of the COVID pandemic was a leader in developing one of the first rapid COVID tests now used across the country and the world. Funding for similar research is now under threat.

Finally, PEF is forecasting that there may be cuts to the SNAP program, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which PEF members help administer for students across the state.

"We get \$500 million just to administer that program for the federal government," said Lyons. "New York got approximately \$8 billion to support Medicaid last year."

This is not the first time any form of government has attempted to scale back the size of the public service workforce, especially in an attempt to privatize.

"We've seen this playbook before where they gut us and tell us a private company can do better," said President Spence. "But when the private company comes in, it ends up costing more money and they deliver worse services."

What is unique about this moment, said Porcari, is that despite there being protections in place to keep workers in their jobs, and of course collectively bargained union contracts, the administration seems to be ignoring most of those protections.

"The administration is hoping that they will be able to do what they want and wait for us to litigate and to spend our hard-earned dues resources to get people's jobs back," said Porcari. "And that is exactly what we're seeing."

PEF members can still do something to fight back against the cuts. On the call, President Spence asked members to call, e-mail or write their representatives in Washington to tell them to do something about the rapid scale back of government services.

The NYS AFL-CIO has set up a system to contact representatives in Congress and ask them to STOP THE CUTS. [By filling out the fields on the right side of this form](#), members will be connected with their representatives. Members can also call (507) 690-6652 and answer the prompts to be connected. The U.S. House of Representatives also has a switchboard that accomplishes the same thing. That number is (202) 224-3121.

PEF members wishing to record a video testimonial about the work they do and why New Yorkers would be harmed by cuts to federal funding of their agencies, are encouraged to contact PEF Communications at Communicator@pef.org. Your testimonial will be added to [a growing video gallery of PEF voices communicating our collective message: Stop the Cuts!](#)





Deadline extended for SUNY Downstate Advisory Board recommendations

By **NAJEE WALKER**

It has been one year since staff, doctors, nurses and students at SUNY Downstate joined with the Brooklyn community, PEF, UUP, and clergy leaders to strike back against a plan by the SUNY Chancellor to close the hospital and transfer its services across the street to Kings County Hospital. Thanks to the coalition's efforts, Governor Kathy Hochul announced last summer she would instead bring the community together with an advisory board, charged with reimagining Brooklyn's premiere public teaching hospital.

In Dec. 2024, the board began its work expecting to deliver recommendations to the Governor by April 1, 2025, following three community hearings. At the first public hearing on Jan. 22, members of the community expressed frustration with the short timeline, especially following such a long wait for the board to be named. It was a sentiment expressed by State Senator Zellnor Myrie, who represents the Brooklyn district that includes Downstate.

"We were promised a truly open public engagement process, an honest assessment of where we are, and real recommendations to improve services for patients in the community," said Sen. Myrie. "We expect SUNY to live up to those promises."

That message was heard by the Governor. The advisory board was told on March 6 that their deadline to submit a plan to Governor Hochul has been extended to June 1, 2025, though no additional hearings will be held. (The final hearing was March 13.)

Kara Fesolovich, a spokeswoman for the governor, said that after discussions with board members and local officials, the governor's decision was made to ensure that board has enough time to bring a plan to the table that reflects the community's voice.



DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

"After decades of disinvestment at SUNY Downstate, Governor Hochul has committed nearly \$1 billion to bring high-quality health care to residents in a modernized facility while protecting health care jobs," said Fesolovich.

Though the push for an extended deadline is a win for advocates who believe in SUNY Downstate's future, the fight for the hospital is still not over, as the community pushes for an additional investment of \$250 million to fully revitalize the hospital.

PEF members can do their part to advocate for funding for SUNY Downstate and Upstate, in Syracuse, by [sending a letter to your local legislators](#).





Left to right: PEF members Leticia Rivera, Gwendolyn Culpepper, Michele Rosello and Kelly Otis pose for a photograph at the reception with AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus, middle.

PEF hosts reception for international women of labor

On March 13 at the PEF office in New York City, the union welcomed delegates from [Public Services International](#) and [Education International](#) for a reception. The delegates were in town for the annual U.N. Status Conference on Women. AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus and Director of Public Employees Jennifer Porcari traveled up from Washington, D.C., to facilitate a discussion about common labor issues and the power of mass mobilization in the current political environment.

PEF President Wayne Spence and members of the PEF Statewide Women's Committee treated the delegates – who came from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ireland, Jamaica, Malawi, Mexico, Norway, Sierra Leone, Togo, and the U.K. – to a meal that celebrated the flavors of NYC – from knishes and jerk chicken to cannolis and black and white cookies – thanks to [Diane Douglaston Catering](#).



New York's 58-year-old Taylor Law protects public sector unions

By **NAJEE WALKER**

New York State is one of 33 states that legally protects its public sector unions. Seven states have either no laws or only allow specific groups like teachers and firefighters to form unions. Nine states have laws that prohibit collective bargaining entirely.

In New York, the Public Employees Fair Employment Act, commonly known as the Taylor Law, was signed into law in 1967 by former Governor Nelson Rockefeller and is named for George W. Taylor, a professor of industrial research who was chairman of the committee to propose amendments to the 1947 Condon-Wadlin Act.

Before the Taylor Law, New York had no legal collective bargaining rights for public workers. The Condon-Wadlin Act created penalties for public workers if they went on strike. It said striking public employees were subject to firing and could only be rehired under a three-year pay freeze and a five-year probation. However, after multiple public sector strikes, Gov. Rockefeller established a committee that, with Professor Taylor as chairman, eventually recommended a new law.

The Taylor Law establishes the right of public employees to organize and collectively bargain with their employers, affords them the right to representation by their union, sets standards for resolving disputes, and prohibits unfair and improper labor practices. The Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) was created to help administer the law.

Importantly, the Taylor Law also established that public employees do not have the right to strike. The penalties for striking by public employees vary, but often include a loss of two days pay for every day, or partial day, that a worker is on strike, as well as and other forms of discipline.

A year into the law's enforcement, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) went on strike, which resulted in leaders of the union being jailed for two weeks.

In 2005, a transit strike led by members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 resulted in a new contract for Metro Transit Authority (MTA) workers, but after finding that the members and TWU violated sections of the Taylor Law, the courts imposed a \$1 million per day fine.



These penalties can come in the form of a “suspension of dues check-off,” which impacts a union’s ability to efficiently collect dues via member paychecks. PERB’s decision to impose penalties can be challenged in court, but it is historically rare for them to be overturned. The courts also impose the fine once the decision is made.

The bottom line is that under the Taylor Law, PEF must affirmatively discourage strikes among its members. As members of a union, however, there are other ways for workers to make their voices heard and express concerns about working conditions and the terms of their employment. The first step for all members is a conversation with your PEF field representative. If you don’t know who to contact, call the appropriate regional office and you’ll be connected.





PEF leaders talk State Museum, staffing needs with local publication

PEF Division 194 Assistant Council Leader Aaron Noble and Executive Board member Mickey Dobbin recently sat down for an-depth chat with Timber, a public interest group for working people based out of Troy, N.Y.

They discussed Gov. Kathy Hochul's proposed \$150 million in capital funds to update the New York State Museum, funding sources of the Office of Cultural Education (OCE), chronic understaffing, and how rank-and-file state workers at OCE feel about the upcoming plans, among other topics.

You can read the [full interview here](#).



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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/>



As part of their course to become a certified OSHA trainer, members had to learn a new skill -- from line dancing to sign language to origami -- and then teach it to their fellow trainees.

PEF members step up to become certified OSHA trainers

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Since the end of the Covid pandemic, PEF has invested considerable time and resources to build up its Health & Safety committees, from local workplaces to agency level. Directed by PEF President Wayne Spence, PEF Vice President Darlene Williams has helped lead the effort with Article 18 Health & Safety Co-Chairs Leisa Abraham and Gabriela Franklyn, as well as PEF's Health & Safety Department.

"Health and safety committees help to keep you and your co-workers safe at work, it is that simple," said Vice President Williams. "We all want to be safe and healthy from the time we arrive at work to the time we leave at the end of the day."

Prior to becoming Vice President, Williams was a certified OSHA trainer for both AFT and PEF. The training she took to become an OSHA trainer provided her with foundational knowledge that allowed her to navigate health and safety issues at her workplace, the Office of Mental Health.

"When we were thinking about how best to reintroduce health and safety to people, I thought about my own background and that training," she said. "I really thought that bringing this training to PEF members would generate interest and empower our members."

The United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers training that teaches the standards of safe and healthy workplaces. PEF members from across the State took two separate classes. The first was a workshop that introduced them to OSHA standards as well as best practices when incidents at the workplace occur. The second training certified them as OSHA trainers, which means they can now teach others what they learned.

"We held the training upstate and downstate and had about 30 members at each training," said Williams. "People gave up their weekends and personal time because they were so interested in this training and in making a difference."

The certification training reviewed the standards, laws and regulations as well as compliance requirements. It also covered the general occupational safety and health standards outlined in OSHA 501 and the Hazard Communication standard (HazCom).

Members said that while they knew they wanted to be more innovative when it comes to the work of their local health and safety committees, becoming a certified trainer was the big draw.

"Becoming an OSHA certified trainer means so much to me because I want to help people stay safe at work," said Intensive Case Manager at Bronx Psychiatric Center and PEF Executive Board member Leticia Rivera. "I'm honored to be among PEF's first OSHA member trainers, and I'm excited for the opportunity to make a difference."

PEF Executive Board member Gwendolyn Culpepper, who is employed as a recreation worker at the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) in Queens, echoed that sentiment and recognized that there is more to OSHA standards than just complying with laws and regulations.

"Achieving my OSHA trainer certification was vital to me because it solidified my commitment to workplace safety and provided a structured, comprehensive understanding of OSHA standards," said Culpepper. "It's not just about compliance; it's about proactively creating safer environments for everyone."

PEF's certified trainers will now train other members. Plans are underway for training sessions in Regions 1, 8 and 9. There is also an Active Shooting training being held at the Region 8 Leadership Conference in May. All of these trainings are driven by members.

"PEF staff can always do the training, but staff does so much already. Having our members doing the training means that they are empowering themselves," Williams. "They don't have to wait to use the knowledge they have to help others."



Newly minted PEF OSHA trainers share what it means to them

The PEF members who achieved certification as OSHA trainers last month share why it's such a significant step for them.

"Becoming an OSHA Authorized Trainer means so much to me because I want to help people stay safe at work. I'm honored to be among PEF's first OSHA member trainers, and I'm excited for the opportunity to make a difference. We can't wait to start sharing what we've learned and help create safer workplaces for everyone."

– Letitia Rivera, Intensive Case Manager, Bronx Psychiatric Center

"I chose to become an authorized OSHA trainer because I firmly believe that every individual should return home in the same condition in which they arrived at work. I am excited to provide education to my fellow PEF members on identifying safety hazards, equipping them with the essential tools needed to enhance workplace safety. This opportunity also enables me to leverage my creativity and further develop my skills in adult education."

– Kelly Otis, Safety Health Inspector, Binghamton Department of Labor

"Achieving my Authorize OSHA Trainer Certification was vital to me because it solidified my commitment to workplace safety and provided a structured, comprehensive understanding of OSHA standards. It's not just about compliance; it's about proactively creating safer environments for everyone. Moving forward, I'm excited to engage with PEF members by sharing my OSHA expertise. I look forward to facilitating practical, accessible training sessions, answering specific safety-related questions, and fostering a culture of prevention."

– Gwendolyn Culpepper, Recreation Worker, OPWDD Bern Fine DDSO

"I am so excited to be able to now go out and train the members with these newly acquired tools of OSHA standards to help the members keep management accountable for Health and Safety issues and Workplace Place Violence Reports. I am ready to teach others what to look for and what to ask for from management to keep themselves and their co-workers safe."

– Michele Rosello, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Creedmoor Psychiatric Center

"I learned the tools of education, language, and the law to support the fight for safety and health for myself and coworkers in the workplace. I am excited for the opportunity to serve my union and to be a part of the bigger picture."

– Alison Rissing, Parole Officer, New Rochelle Area Office, DOCCS

"This important program will significantly improve the safety and health within state agencies and provide valuable information to our members. The OSHA outreach program will ensure that the membership has the knowledge and tools they need to address unsafe conditions within the workplace. I look forward to working with my fellow OSHA trainers in the future."

– Michael Marquez, PEF Health & Safety Trainer



Further your education at school of labor, urban studies

The CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies is offering a series of events designed to help you prepare for the Fall 2025 semester, whether you are beginning your academic journey or looking to take the next step.

There will be virtual general information sessions from 6 to 7 p.m. on multiple dates, offering details on SLU's programs, admissions process, campus life, and how the school can help you achieve your

goals; a virtual personal statement workshop from 6 to 7 p.m. on multiple dates will offer guidance on crafting a compelling personal statement; and there will be a fast track walk-in admissions day April at SLU in New York City.

For more information, check out this [flyer](#), visit slu.cuny.edu or email admissions@slu.cuny.edu.

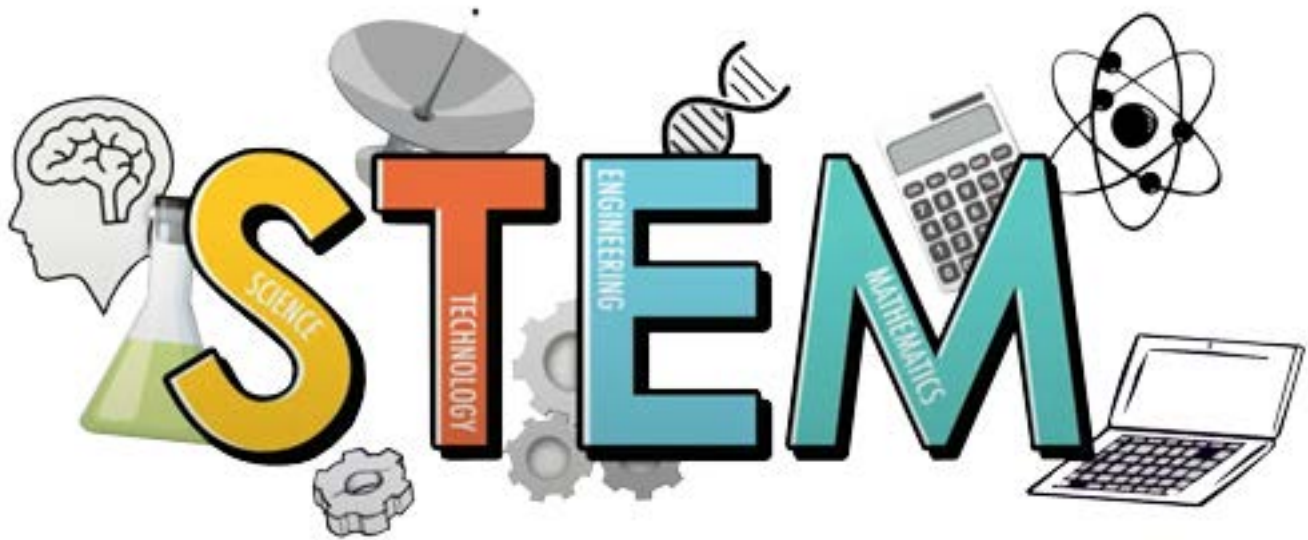


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New + Existing PEF Members

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STEM Incentive Program Now Open for New York High School Seniors

College can be expensive, but the [NYS STEM Incentive Program](#) offers students pursuing science, technology, engineering, or math degrees an incredible opportunity to attend a state-operated SUNY or CUNY college tuition-free.

For the 2024-25 academic year, the award is equal to the average SUNY tuition rate of \$7,070 or actual tuition, whichever is less. Awards are reduced by the amount of any other tuition assistance awards received, such as NYS TAP.

To be eligible, students must:

- Apply during their senior year in high school
- Be ranked in the top 10% of their New York state high school graduating class.
- Enroll in an undergraduate program in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics.
- Commit to living and working in New York State for five years in an [approved field](#).

Students who don't meet residency requirements may qualify for STEM through the [NYS DREAM Act](#).

The application deadline for the 2025-2026 academic year is **Aug. 15, 2025**.

For more information and to apply, visit hesc.ny.gov/STEM.



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





PEF in the News



Executive Board to consider vote of no confidence in OMH commissioner

News outlets picked up the union's press release announcing the Executive Board's unanimous vote at the quarterly meeting March 28 in Albany. Due to the lack of her response following workplace violence incidents at psychiatric facilities, the board agreed to draft and debate a resolution expressing no confidence in the leadership of OMH Commissioner Ann Marie Sullivan when they next convene on June 12.

Click [here](#) and [here](#) for the stories (subscription required).



President Spence quoted in highway worker protection release

Gov. Kathy Hochul's executive budget proposals would make automated work zone speed enforcement programs permanent and enhance penalties for assaults against transportation workers.

Vice President Bruce Giddings attended [a press conference on March 26](#) off the thruway supporting the measure, and President Spence was quoted in the press release – voicing support for the measure and advocating that assault on all public employees during the performance of their duties come with enhanced penalties.

Click [here](#) for the release.



The New York State Senate

PEF president joins virtual panel in honor of Black History Month

State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Sen. Shelley Mayer hosted a Black History Month virtual panel and invited President Wayne Spence to participate, along with George Gresham, President of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East; Nancy Hagens, President of the New York State Nurses Association and a National Nurses United President; and Terrence Melvin, President of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and Secretary-Treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO.

Click [here](#) for release.

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.

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 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,.

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, or call 518-785-1900.





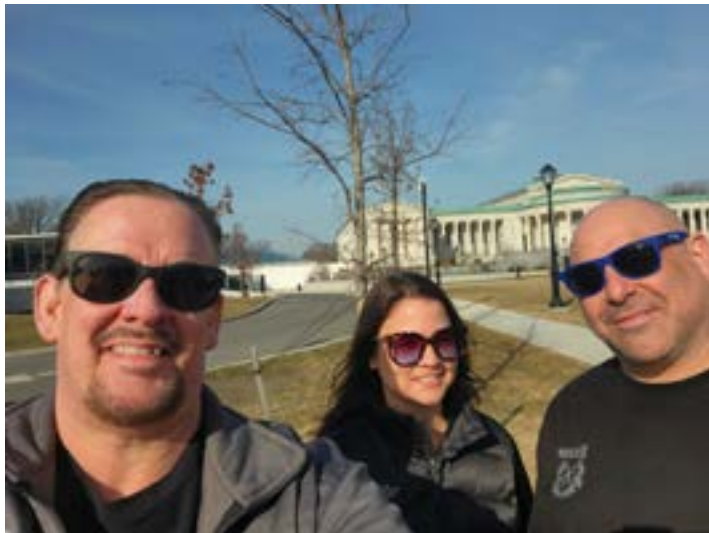
March 14, 2025

PEF Region 12 Coordinator and engineer Corinne Testa attended a press event on Long Island, joining DOT Commissioner Dominguez in calling for the work zone camera program to be made permanent, as well as heightened penalties against anyone who assaults public employees, including transportation workers.



March 14, 2025

Region 7 members attended the Northeast Central Labor Council's Legislative Breakfast in Plattsburgh with Senator Dan Stec, Assemblyman D. Billy Jones and Assemblyman Matt Simpson. Thank you to those that advocated for Region 7!



March 13, 2025

PEF Members from PEF Region 1 showed up to rally and support union Members at AKG who were recently fired and replaced with non-union employees



March 8, 2025

PEF partnered with SEIU Local 371 to deliver a panel discussion at Somos in Albany about the uptick in Workplace Violence against State workers and what the unions are doing about it.





March 15, 2025

Region 3 held a Legislative Breakfast in Rochester with 89 members in attendance! PEF members heard from speakers including Region Coordinator Leisa Abraham, VP Randi DiAntonio, ALF President Dan Maloney, Congressman Joe Morelle, Assemblywoman Jen Lunsford, Assemblymember Harry Bronson, Senator Jeremy Cooney, Assemblyman Demond Meeks and Brian Manktelow NY State Assembly 130th district.

March 29, 2025

PEF was honored by the Broome County Democratic Committee at the 28th annual Jefferson Breakfast for the union's commitment to democratic values. PEF Region 5 Coordinator Scott Staub attended the breakfast to receive the honor on behalf of PEF. Congratulations, Region 5!



March 26, 2025

PEF VP Bruce Giddings attended a New York State Department of Transportation press conference in Albany advocating for expansion of automated workzone cameras to ensure drivers are alert and maintaining an appropriate speed in workzones. PEF is also pushing for increased penalties for assaults against any public employee in the performance of their duties.



March 22, 2025

PEF President Spence was joined by other union leaders and members at a rally outside a Social Security office in White Plains. The office is scheduled for closure as the Trump administration continues to slash critical staff and resources across the federal government. If you'd like to contact your Congress member and speak out against federal cuts, call (202) 224-3121. Thanks to AFT President Randi Weingarten for leading the fight and NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for showing up in solidarity!



March 21, 2025

PEF Statewide Women's and Emerging Leaders Committees hosted an in person (and virtual) celebration at the PEF NYC office in celebration of Women's History month. They created vision boards that provoked lots of discussion and laughter as they cut out images that spoke to their life and career goals!





Letters to the Editor

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

We want to hear from you!

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

