

Vol. 43

# *The* COMMUNICATOR

No. 8

OCTOBER 2025



Dorothy E. Reid, 1937-2025  
*Legacy of former PEF member  
lives on in history*

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## THE COMMUNICATOR

Volume 43 No.8  
October 2025 (0745-6514)

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

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

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# The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



On October 19, more than 700 PEF members will travel to Lake Placid for the 47th Annual PEF Convention, the [first time since 2018](#) the union will visit the Adirondack town. Now, like then, the highest decision-making body of PEF is convening as we prepare to enter what promises to be an all-hands-on-deck round of contract negotiations. With the state budget in flux due to federal cuts and the Department of Civil Service considering changes to its merit and fitness system, delegates have a lot of work to do, from debating resolutions that shape PEF policy to approving legislative agendas.

Members not coming to Convention can stay up to date this year via the PEF app (download instructions can be found at [www.pef.org/app](http://www.pef.org/app)) and we'll have frequent posts on the union's social media channels. After Convention ends, we will send out a Special Edition of the Communicator as well.

In this issue, we feature the [obituary of Dorothy Elizabeth Reid](#), a former PEF member who, at the age of 14, became one of the original plaintiffs in the Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board case, one of five legal cases that would later become the landmark Brown v. Board of Education, the historic Supreme Court decision that desegregated public schools. She led a remarkable life, teaching her kids the value of both education and public service.

We also report on the recommendations of the committee tasked with studying amendments to the [Humane Alternatives to Long-term Solitary Confinement \(HALT\) Act](#), where the insight of PEF members proved valuable. While the state is not required to implement the recommendations, we will never stop advocating on behalf of our members at DOCCS.

In this issue, you will also find a story about [a unique PEF job at the Department of Labor, information on scholarships](#) and the college application process, and our list of members in need of [leave donations](#). If you have an abundance of banked time, please consider donating to a fellow member in need.

As always, thank you for staying informed and for being a PEF member. I look forward to seeing some of you later this month in Lake Placid.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence  
PEF President



In the wake of strikes by corrections officers at DOCCS facilities in February and March of 2025, the state formed a committee to propose amendments to the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement ("HALT") Act.

# HALT Committee releases recommendations for reform

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF leaders played a pivotal role on the committee established in March 2025 after the DOCCS strikes to propose amendments to the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement ("HALT") Act. The committee's focus was on improving safety while preserving the core principles of HALT. Recommendations were created through collaboration with various stakeholders, including state agencies, other unions, and advocacy groups.

"New York cannot hope to achieve the goal of transforming its correctional system without significant reform," said President Wayne Spence. "PEF supported legislation recently passed, which if enacted, will provide greater oversight and accountability in the state's correctional facilities, including expanded use of fixed and body cameras and an expanded oversight role for the Commission on Correction. And, while this legislation is an important step in the transformation process, it fails to address the need for meaningful reform to enhance the safety and security of all incarcerated individuals and staff in the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS)."

PEF was proud to participate in the committee charged with reviewing HALT to discuss the promise, the problems and unintended consequences of this landmark law. President Spence was joined on the committee by Steve Drake, chair of the PEF/DOCCS Labor-Management Committee at the time, Lindsay Bonanza, a teacher at Marcy Correctional Facility, Anne Jordan, an offender rehabilitation coordinator at Groveland Correctional Facility, and Jeff Taylor, a registered nurse at Clinton Correctional Facility.

"The committee worked to forge fair and reasonable reforms to address the ongoing and well-documented safety and security problems faced by incarcerated individuals and staff in the state's correctional facilities," President Spence said. "The committee's recommendations reflect common sense solutions to address persistent and dangerous situations being caused by just a relatively few bad actors."

The recommendations include:

- **Deter Specific Serious Offenses:** Clarify that sexual harassment and lewd conduct constitute behaviors that are eligible for placement in segregated confinement; add a new offense for conduct that is consistent with aggravated harassment of an employee (unhygienic acts); address patterns of extortion in connection with a gang or criminal enterprise by clarifying that such behavior is eligible for segregated confinement; and reduce the subjectivity of standards that have limited the imposition of segregated confinement for participating in a riot, escape, or attempted escape.
- **Protective Custody:** Allow temporary placement in a Special Housing Unit (SHU) or Residential Rehabilitation Unit (RRU) for up to three days when there is an unreasonable risk to safety and there is no other suitable alternative housing.
- **Recidivism Measures:** DOCCS would gain flexibility to address repeat offenses in disciplinary housing and general population, including potential placement in SHU for up to 15 days for recidivist misconduct.
- **Broader Offense Definitions:** Recommends amending the HALT Act to allow segregated confinement for a wider range of serious offenses, reducing reliance on subjective standards.
- **Balance Discipline with Incentives:** Recommendations include modifying positive incentive programs to ensure broader access for the incarcerated population, promoting good behavior and engagement in programming.

“The goal of these reforms is to provide a more supportive and safer environment for incarcerated individuals who are working to improve their lives and to help attract and retain the staff needed to support their rehabilitation,” said President Spence. “PEF urges policymakers to act on these recommendations so that we can work towards our shared vision of supporting and empowering incarcerated individuals to rehabilitate their lives with the hope that one day they can return and be productive members of their communities.”

The committee’s recommendations were delivered to the State Legislature and Governor Hochul in September, with hopes that they will consider codifying them into law during the 2026 legislative session.



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## Blast from the Past

# Blast from the Past: The 40th PEF Convention in Lake Placid

By **NAJEE WALKER**

On Oct. 19, more than 700 PEF delegates will gather in Lake Placid for the 47th annual PEF Convention. The Adirondack town is no stranger to PEF, having hosted the union's annual Convention many times. The last time was in 2018, and many of the challenges PEF and other unions faced then are emerging once more.

### Union Strong

At the 40th Annual PEF Convention, members held Union Strong and Winning the Future Together banners high above their heads and focused their energy on the future. While the theme this year is "Stronger Roots, Bolder Future," the sentiment about union strength and solidarity remains the same. Members were urged in 2018 to remain committed to the labor movement, and stay engaged and educated.

### Political Action in 2018

"A lot of people tell me, 'I'm not political.' If you are a government employee, you are political," PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio told delegates in 2018. "We need to keep the funding, so we can keep services running, so we can keep our jobs. This is an all hands-on-deck moment."

VP DiAntonio's message this year will be similar, and delegates will be encouraged to contribute to the [Committee on Political Education \(COPE\)](#), which provides the only funds from PEF members for federal lobbying. Union dues cannot be used for lobbying at the federal level.

### Erosion of Civil Service

Following years of under-funding, the Department of Civil Service (DCS) met its match when the COVID pandemic ushered in a critical short staffing crisis in 2022. In response, State leadership implemented the NY HELPS (Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide) program which waived examinations for many jobs. The State assured PEF that NY HELPS would allow them the time and resources to increase promotion exam frequency and open 12 computer-based testing centers. Unfortunately, DCS has not delivered on these promises. They hosted fewer promotion exams this year and none of the promised testing centers are opened. PEF is grateful that NY HELPS offered career mobility options for some who had waited many years for exams, and we are thankful to our

new members who joined the union after being hired via NY HELPS, but the program was always meant to be temporary. If it remains in place past the June 2026 expiration date the State has announced, it has the potential to erode the proven merit-based system that keeps the State's hiring and promotional practices fair and outside of political influence.

Seven years ago, in 2018, the concern was also centered largely on promotions and the civil service system being circumvented in favor of nepotism. At the time, PEF was clear that it saw issues with the system.

"After speaking with the governor and explaining the many issues created by the Department of Civil Service, he mandated that Civil Service meet with PEF in a labor-management forum," PEF President Wayne Spence told Convention delegates in 2018. "This is something that has never been accomplished before."

Today, PEF is participating this fall in a series of roundtables around the State with the Department of Civil Service and legislative stakeholders to discuss the future of the system.

### The introduction of Janus

The Supreme Court decision in Janus v. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in 2018 changed the landscape for unions. PEF and other public-sector unions fought back against groups like New Choice NY, which launched a union-busting campaign to try and convince PEF members to leave the union.

Today, PEF still fights against groups who seek to weaken the labor movement by getting members to leave their unions through coercion and deception. PEF has been largely successful in significantly limiting the opt-out rate by communicating with members of the bargaining unit about the value and protections offered by union membership.

### **Contract, Contract, Contract**

In 2018, like today, PEF was gearing up to negotiate its Collective Bargaining Agreements with the State.

The only difference is the timing. In 2018, Convention delegates took the Contract survey on location, expressing which priorities they wanted the team to pursue. This year, the survey has already closed, and the team is gearing up to sit down with the Office of Employee Relations (OER) later this year or in early 2026.

The 47th Annual PEF Convention runs from Oct. 19-22, in Lake Placid, N.Y. Members will receive a full report in a Special Communicator later this month and can follow PEF's social media accounts ([Facebook](#), [Bluesky](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#)) for updates on location.



# Legacy of former PEF member lives on in history

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Dorothy Elizabeth Reid was a long time PEF member. She worked for New York State for 28 years in various roles, including State Safety Officer, Social Worker and Case Manager for then-named Department of Mental Health Services. She retired in 1991 and joined PEF Retirees in 1996. On September 25, 2025, Reid passed away, surrounded by family members at the age of 88.

Reid lived a life that helped shape the future of the United States. She was born on February 25, 1937, in Meherrin, Virginia, the third of eight children. At 14 years old, Reid—who then was Dorothy E. Davis—became the original plaintiff in the Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board case, one of the five cases that would later become the landmark Brown v. Board of Education, the historic Supreme Court decision of 1954 that forced public schools to desegregate.

After attending schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia, Reid enrolled at Norfolk State University, then moved to New York and finished her education at Brooklyn Community College, where she obtained a nursing degree.

Reid was always politically active and involved in her community. She dedicated much of her time to fighting for civil and equal rights, joining the NAACP, her Neighborhood Association, and involving herself with the Democratic Party.

Her daughter, Renee Reid, is a Parole Officer with DOCCS in Queens, a PEF Steward and a Convention Delegate.

"She always wanted us to have a good education," she said. "And when it came to her professional career, she was very dedicated."

Charles Reynolds is Dorothy Reid's son. He said that his mother's struggles throughout her shaped her values.

"She understood her struggles growing up as a young lady in segregated communities," said Reynolds. "She found a way to grasp those opportunities that came about for minorities and taught others how to seek those opportunities as well."

Renee Reid remembers her mother as very knowledgeable, hard-working and compassionate. As a PEF member, she saw the good her mother did both for the union and for the state in her various roles.

"In the beginning, I remember seeing a lot of the creativity she had in various departments," she said. "It was very encouraging for me and inspired me to find work with the state as well."



In family conversations, Reid would often speak about titles.

"In our lives we're blessed with several titles. The titles associating us with our family describe the special bonds that unite us and hold us together like glue," Reid recalls her mother telling them.

Although neither Renee nor Charles can remember the source of the quote, they said that the importance of family, community and hard work were impressed upon them at a young age.

Her children hope that her love and legacy will carry on, not only through her family, but through history. As a firm believer in civil rights and education, Renee Reid is proud of what her mother is leaving behind.

"My mother's legacy will never, ever go in vain," she said. "Her story has become a part of history."



Dorothy E. Reid (Davis) stands in the center with students named in *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* in 1953.

# From fairs to theme parks to ski resorts, PEF members keep you safe

By KATE STICKLES

Before a visitor steps onto a ride, whether at a county fair, a permanent park, or the annual New York State Fair in Syracuse, a safety and health inspector from the Department of Labor (DOL) has seen and inspected that ride to ensure their safety.

Matthew Leonard, a PEF member since 2008, is a safety and health inspector with the DOL's Industry Inspection Bureau. Throughout the summer, he spent many days in the field, inspecting rides.

He explained the different things inspectors look at and how in depth they go to make sure you and your loved ones can ride with confidence. This includes looking at manufacturer assembly manuals and engineering drawings.

"We start by looking at the amusement device on the trailers they arrive on, sometimes days before the fair opens," Leonard said. "We examine the structure of the device, inspecting the steel, welds, fasteners, electrical wires and cables, steel cables, hydraulic hoses/cylinders, gears, motor, and other components."

Once the rides are assembled, the inspection continues.

"We watch the device 'spin' and make sure it operates as designed," he said. "We are checking to ensure the control function works correctly (starts and stops), the brakes engage (if required), the device runs at the proper speed, and the operator knows how to safely run the device."

Possible problems inspectors find include bad seat belts, missing hardware, wrong hardware, cut electrical wires, and some sharp objects.

"Sometimes you may even find a crack in steel, a broken weld, or bad brake," Leonard said.

While some rides are decades old, and come with the challenges of age, technology is advancing, and ride controls are improving.

"The new devices have soft-start controls, computer-controlled interfaces, and various new safety sensors," he said. "Soft-start controls are used to manage the initial application of power to electric motors, resulting in a smooth, gradual startup. This reduces electrical and mechanical stress, protecting both the machinery and the passengers."

"These features also help eliminate any human operator errors," he said. "A lot of the newer rides are manufactured in other countries and are all designed to conform to our safety standards."

For permanent rides, like those found at amusement and water parks, Leonard said there are yearly inspections and permitting requirements.

"The inspectors typically go back and perform operational inspections during the season to make sure no issues have occurred," he said. "In the fall, we also inspect haunted houses and amusement devices at pumpkin farms or fall festivals."

Leonard began his career at DOL as a prevailing wage investigator – but knew he wanted to get out in the field.

"The best part of my job now is helping make sure the public is safe," he said. "The amusement device owners we regulate truly want to see us; they want us to help them become safer and for us to be a second set of eyes. They are typically a pleasure to work with, and I'm thankful for that."

Health and safety inspectors at DOL are highly educated, training with outside organizations like the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials, Lift Maintenance Seminar for ski lifts, and various New York State Code classes. They also do more than just inspect amusement rides.

"Many people have no idea what this department does daily," Leonard said. "In addition to inspecting amusement rides, we are also responsible for inspection and enforcement in a variety of other industries. Every day is different."

"In one day, we could be inspecting amusement devices, next we're on to an explosives inspection, then off to a construction site inspecting certified crane operators, and then finish the day inspecting a car wash. The next day we might be looking at a ski lift or a place of public assembly, like a movie theater. It's very rewarding to know that you, along with our safety partners, keep people safe."



Credit: New York State Department of Labor. PEF member and DOL health and safety inspector Matthew Leonard is pictured with New York State Department of Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon at the New York State Fair in Syracuse.



Credit: New York State Department of Labor. NYS Department of Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon (white pants) poses for a photo with ride inspectors and DOL Worker Protection employees at the State Fair in Syracuse in August.



# Members looking for college assistance have options through PEF and New York State

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Every year, costs associated with higher education increase, placing burdens on both students and their families as they try to cover tuition, room and board, textbooks and more. PEF members looking for ways to bring down those costs should consider various scholarships offered by the union and our partners in labor.

## College Application Month waivers

October is New York State College Application Month. As part of a statewide initiative to help students apply to college, 130 higher education institutions across the state waive their application fees for the month of October.

This initiative is administered by the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC). The agency also helps provide students and families with resources, guidance and support to make the college application process less stressful and more affordable.

Piper Light is the Outreach Manager for HESC, and a PEF member since 2015. She said that simple application fees can sometimes prevent students from pursuing the college of their dreams.

“With the application waived, students can apply to multiple colleges without the burden of application fees, removing a big barrier and making it easier for students to pursue their college goals,” said Light.

Students and parents should visit the [HESC website](#) for a complete list of participating schools and their fee waiver dates.

## Scholarships from PEF

Since 1988, PEF has sponsored the Joseph Scacalossi Scholarship. The scholarship awards \$1,000 per year for four years to the child, stepchild, or ward of an active, retired or deceased PEF member. Only 10 students are chosen per year, and it is only available to high school seniors or college freshman.

PEF members and their children can now begin the application process for next year by [visiting the PEF website](#). Preliminary applications are due by March 13, 2026.

PEF Regional and Division Scholarships are also sometimes available. In most cases, it is best for members to check with their PEF Council Leader or Regional Coordinator for more information on

scholarships in your area. When headquarters is notified about them, we post details and application forms on [this page](#).

PEF scholarships can also help PEF members, not just their dependents. Active female PEF members who are looking to pursue a degree at a post-secondary institution can submit an application for the [Jean DeBow Women in PEF Scholarship](#). The scholarship was created in memory of former Vice President Jean DeBow. It awards winners \$1,000 to assist in their education goals. Applications are due by May 1, 2026.

### The Union Plus Scholarship Program

PEF's affiliation with AFT and SEIU means members are also eligible for the [Union Plus Scholarship Program](#). This scholarship is very competitive, with more than 5,000 applications received each year. The awards range between \$500 and \$4,000. Applicants are scored based on academic ability, social awareness, financial need and appreciation of labor. Next year's deadline is Jan. 31, 2026.

### NYS Stem Incentive Program

The 2026-27 [NYS STEM Incentive Program](#) application is now open for New York state students who plan to attend a SUNY or CUNY college.

To be eligible, students must:

- Be ranked in the top 10% of their high school graduating class at a New York state high school.
- Enroll in an [undergraduate program](#) in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics.
- Commit to living and working in a [STEM occupation](#) in New York state for five years.

Students must apply for STEM during their senior year of high school. Students who don't meet citizenship or residency requirements may still qualify for New York state financial aid through alternate pathways, like the Sen. José Peralta NYS DREAM Act or the Alternate Eligibility Path. Visit the [Applying for Aid](#) webpage to learn more.

The application deadline for the 2026-2027 academic year is Aug. 15, 2026. To learn more and to apply, visit [hesc.ny.gov/STEM](https://hesc.ny.gov/STEM)

### FAFSA, TAP now open

The 2026–27 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) applications are now open. Applying early means you'll know your aid eligibility sooner, have time to fix any errors, and give colleges the information they need to build your financial aid package.

Steps to apply:

- Create your StudentAid.gov account.
- Complete your FAFSA.
- Use the state link at the end to complete your TAP application.



# Recommit Today!

## New + Existing PEF Members

# SIGN NOW!

# Why Do Fascists Fear Unions?

By **RANDI WEINGARTEN**



As President Joe Biden often points out, “The middle class built America, and unions built the middle class.”<sup>1</sup> It is incredibly powerful to look at historic charts of union membership versus income distribution in the United States.<sup>2</sup> When unionization rates rise like a mountain, income inequality craters into a valley. Unions level the playing field. But, of course, the opposite is also true. When unionization declines, income inequality rises.

The earliest forms of labor organizing in America were enslaved Black people and enslaved Native Americans leading rebellions throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>3</sup> In 1794, the first known union in the United States—a union of shoemakers—was founded in Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup> Mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts—including girls as young as 12—formed the first union of working women in the nation and in 1834 went on strike over wage cuts.<sup>5</sup> In 1867, around 3,000 Chinese laborers building the Transcontinental Railroad launched what was at the time the largest strike in the nation’s history, stopping work to demand better wages.<sup>6</sup>

In the mid-1800s, Americans regularly worked 12 hours a day or even longer.<sup>7</sup> Between 1890 and 1910, almost one out of every five children between the ages of 10 and 15 was working.<sup>8</sup> And conditions were abysmal. As just one example, the nation was rocked in March 1911 when the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in lower Manhattan caught fire.<sup>9</sup> Poor ventilation meant the fire spread quickly, and locked doors and a single faulty fire escape meant workers couldn’t get out. That day, 146 burned alive or leapt from windows to their death.

But it was only because unions pressed for change that, in 1938, the federal government passed the Fair Labor Standards Act.<sup>10</sup> The law established a maximum workweek of 40 hours and required that anyone working more than that be paid overtime. Plus, the law established a federal minimum wage and banned child labor. It would take over 30 more years for unions to win the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1970, creating minimum workplace safety and health standards.<sup>11</sup>

As the power and influence of unions grew, so did attacks from employers. It became common for businesses to “spy on, interrogate, discipline, discharge, and blacklist union members.”<sup>12</sup> So unions also pressed for and won the National Labor Relations Act. Enacted in 1935, the law guarantees workers “the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection.”<sup>13</sup> This is the foundation of labor rights—giving real voice and workplace democracy to millions of American workers who had for too long been powerless.

Why do fascists, oligarchs, autocrats, and the far right hate unions so much? To understand that, it’s important to first understand how unions work.



### Unions Give Workers a Voice—and Power

On the one hand, unions are like any other membership organization that people join because of shared interests. If you care about the environment and want more green space in your community, you might join a garden club or local environmental group. Well, if you care about your job and want to make sure you and other workers are treated fairly at work, you start a union or join one that already exists.

But unions have power that few other organizations do because, legally, they can represent groups of members in a workplace and bargain on behalf of those workers over the terms and conditions of work. And the right to do so—the right to form a union and collectively bargain with other workers—is protected under a mix of federal and state laws.<sup>14</sup>

Unions are also unique in that they are democratic organizations. Locals have constitutions and elections. All of the leaders are elected, including, in the case of national unions like mine, the members electing leaders of their national unions. I am elected to a two-year term by the members of the AFT at its biennial convention. Together, we express shared interests with a shared voice. One of the best examples of this is through collective bargaining, which is the way that unions and the employers they work with arrive at a contract—where the terms and conditions of the working relationship are agreed upon. Whatever the size or strategy, it’s called “collective bargaining” because workers are coming together through their unions to negotiate as a group with employers on work-related issues. And workers have power in those negotiations because of their members joining together as one.

Unions make a powerful difference in the lives of working people. Unions raise wages for their members by an average of 10 to 15 percent.<sup>15</sup> Over 9 out of 10 union members have employer-sponsored health benefits and paid sick days, significantly higher rates than for nonunion workers.<sup>16</sup> And union workers are more likely to have employer-sponsored retirement plans than nonunion workers.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, where there are strong unions, average wages are higher across the board, even for nonunionized workers.<sup>18</sup> For every 1 percent more that private workers are unionized, wages for nonunion workers go up 0.3 percent.<sup>19</sup> And the effect is even greater for workers without college degrees.

It’s no surprise that fascists don’t like unions. Unions make life better for all working people. Fascists rely on what political scientist Jean Hardisty called “mobilizing resentment,” but that strategy doesn’t work if there’s no resentment to mobilize.<sup>20</sup> Fascists need extreme economic inequality to provide the fertile ground for scapegoating immigrants and other vulnerable minorities. And the same playbook used to crush unions is deployed to silence journalists, demonize activists, and suppress voters—because fascism can’t survive in a world where we, the people, have power, information, and opportunity.

Plus, of course, some fascists are oligarchs—or are aligned with oligarchs—who personally reap the benefits of wealth inequality. Elon Musk—the wealthiest person in the world and the top supporter of Donald Trump’s second presidential campaign—has profited by exploiting workers.<sup>21</sup> Musk reportedly gloated about his employees trying to impress him by working 20 hours a day and sleeping in the office.<sup>22</sup> And a US appeals court ruled that Musk illegally threatened that Tesla workers would lose benefits if they unionized.<sup>23</sup> He once said he disagrees with “the idea of unions” because they create “a lords and peasants sort of thing.”<sup>24</sup> Labor reporter Steven Greenhouse comments, “That the world’s richest human dissed the idea of unions should certainly be seen as a selling point for unionizing. Musk’s statement shows that he realizes that unions can be highly effective in harnessing the collective voice and power of workers.”<sup>25</sup> As a result of Musk’s philosophy, nonunionized Tesla workers earn significantly less than auto workers covered by the United Auto Workers union—in some cases as much as 40 percent less.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, amid mounting accusations of abuse against workers at SpaceX, Musk filed an audacious suit in federal court arguing that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is unconstitutional.<sup>27</sup> This is one of dozens of lawsuits that Musk’s SpaceX, Jeff Bezos’s Amazon, and other corporations have filed against the NLRB.<sup>28</sup>

Look, no institution is perfect. That’s why I work tirelessly to make the labor movement more effective. But while unions face almost constant scrutiny, wealthy, powerful special interests are often let completely off the hook. For instance, when some of the largest private banks in America made massive mistakes leading to the 2008 financial crisis, they weren’t held accountable. They were bailed out and propped up.<sup>29</sup> So bear in mind that when the friends of these bankers and other billionaire special interests attack unions, they don’t really believe in “accountability” in any real sense. They just want to destroy the ability of unions to be a check on their unfettered power.

It’s one thing for business owners or the government to disagree with labor unions about wages and other aspects of a contract negotiation. But attacks on the very existence of labor unions is a hallmark of fascism, as philosophy professor Jason Stanley explains. “Antipathy to labor unions is such a major theme of fascist politics that fascism cannot be fully comprehended without an understanding of it,” writes Stanley.<sup>30</sup>

“Fascism is most effective in times of severe economic inequality,” explains journalist Spencer Bokart-Lindell.<sup>31</sup> But fascism also relies on individuals in society feeling isolated, what philosopher Hannah Arendt called being “atomized.”<sup>32</sup> After all, when we don’t know our neighbors, it’s easier for fascist propaganda to turn us against each other. Unions show how our fates are linked and not only deliver better material conditions but make people feel connected to each other and engaged in their lives, jobs, and communities. Labor unions “promote solidarity across differences that fascism depends on exploiting,” writes Bokart-Lindell.<sup>33</sup>



### Unions Strengthen the Middle Class—and Democracy

When unions are strong, America’s middle class is strong, too. Between 1985 and 2011, when the proportion of union membership in the United States dropped by 8 percent, the number of middle-class households in the United States also dropped by 8 percent.<sup>34</sup> In fact, between 1973 and 2007, data show that anywhere from one-fifth to as much as one-third of the growth in economic inequality in the United States can be attributed to declines in union membership—“an effect comparable to the growing stratification of wages by education.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet as economic inequality has skyrocketed, and exploitation by billionaires and big business has skyrocketed, support for unions has risen. In 2024, 7 out of 10 Americans had a favorable view of unions—nearly the highest approval rating in 60 years.<sup>36</sup> In fact, as confidence in every other major American institution—from the criminal justice system to Congress to TV news to the military—has fallen, trust in unions has increased.<sup>37</sup>

Unions build the middle class. And unions also build democracy. Historian Heather Cox Richardson talks about how “regular people having agency” is fundamentally disruptive to the fascist agenda that puts all power in a singular authoritarian leader.<sup>38</sup> She adds that “people feeling as if they have agency and taking a stand for their rights” is the point of democracy. It’s also the point of the labor movement. Instead of feeling isolated and “atomized” and outside of decision-making—where resentment and even conspiracy theories can fester—union members feel integral to systems of power and clear on their own power to make change. That’s good for all of us as individuals and good for our nation as a whole. Unions practice democracy internally by voting on leadership and contract negotiations. And they strengthen democracy in our nation not only by endorsing candidates but by encouraging people to vote. Union membership increases civic participation. In swing states like Pennsylvania and Michigan, an estimated one in five voters is a union member, and research shows that union members are at least 3 to 5 percent more likely to vote than nonunion members.<sup>39</sup>

Political scientists Patrick Flavin and Benjamin Radcliff explain that belonging to a union is a form of “political participation in the workplace” that “translates beyond just the workplace and increases a member’s likelihood of becoming involved in the political process and, ultimately, voting.”<sup>40</sup> But just like unions boost wages for all workers, not just union members, unions boost rates of voting for all Americans. Even nonunion members living in states with strong unions are more likely to vote.<sup>41</sup> Plus, of course, unions take all that agency and engagement and voice and use it to fight for what our communities need. That’s especially true for unions that represent teachers, which fight not only for members in negotiations over wages and benefits but also for what our students need to succeed. And it’s what our nurse locals are also starting to do in our Code Red campaign for patients—raising the alarm about staffing shortages in healthcare facilities.

Voting is the first step in protecting democracy and opportunity, but creating and joining unions is even more powerful for working people—because collective power is the true antidote to authoritarianism. As the labor strategist Michael Podhorzer puts it, “Voting is like going to a restaurant and choosing between entrees on the menu. Collective power is like sitting at the table deciding what’s on the menu.”<sup>42</sup> In a true democracy, more and more people have power not just in elections but in deciding how the economy and business and schools and every aspect of society are governed and run. That’s the power of unions. And that’s what truly threatens fascists.

The good news is that unions in the United States are growing, surging in both numbers and popularity. As I’ve already noted, support for unions has grown as Americans have become frustrated by the rise of billionaires and mega-corporations and fed up with leaders like Donald Trump who keep giving more tax cuts and privileges to the super-rich while squeezing the middle class. And unionization has grown, too. In 2021, there were 1,638 groups of employees filing paperwork with the National Labor Relations Board seeking elections to form new unions. But in 2022, 2,510 such petitions were filed—a 53 percent increase.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, between 2022 and 2024, the AFT organized 185 new bargaining units across the fields of education, healthcare, and public services.<sup>44</sup>

Authoritarians and the far right fear unions building power because that power is used to make people’s lives better—to rebuild the middle class and ensure that more and more people have access to the American dream. Plus, union power is used to increase wages and pensions and health insurance and other benefits.



While we don’t yet know everything Trump will do—or try to do—in his second term as president, we know that prioritizing the billionaire class at the expense of ordinary Americans amounts to a great betrayal from the man who sold himself during the election as the savior of the working class. In his farewell address, President Biden issued an urgent—and accurate—warning: “Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead.”<sup>45</sup>

Americans want a better life and more opportunity, not less. They want to be treated with dignity and respect, and they want the same for others, too. From my lifetime of working with Americans across the political spectrum, I know this to be true. We are in a profoundly consequential fight between fear and hope, between anger and aspiration, between chaos and community. And I know, with every fiber of my being, that hope and aspiration and community always win—when we fight for them. Yes, the story of America has included too many dark chapters enabled by our worst impulses. But what makes our nation great isn’t that we’ve always been perfect but that we have fought for justice and have learned from our mistakes—that just as our forebearers forged a new nation to improve upon the one they fought for freedom, so too did our grandparents and our great-grandparents fight to make America more just, more fair, more equitable, more inclusive. An America of boundless opportunity. An America where the next generation has a pathway to the American dream. Just like we, in this moment, must fight for those values and that vision—and educate our children and grandchildren so that they, too, can continue to write the story of America that continues to reach toward hope and aspiration and opportunity and liberty and justice for all.

Randi Weingarten, JD, is the president of the AFT. Prior to her election in 2008, she served for 11 years as president of the United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2. A teacher of history at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn from 1991 to 1997, Weingarten helped her students win several state and national awards debating constitutional issues. Widely recognized as a champion of public schools and a better life for all people, her commendations include being named to Washingtonian's 2023 Most Influential People in Washington and City & State New York's 2021 New York City Labor Power 100. This article was excerpted with permission from Randi Weingarten's new book, *Why Fascists Fear Teachers: Public Education and the Future of Democracy*, published in September 2025 by Thesis, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. Weingarten is donating half of her proceeds from the book to the AFT's Disaster Relief Fund and Educational Foundation.

Endnotes: [Click here to view all endnotes](#)



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## Division 247 (DOT) offers scholarship opportunity

Division 247 is now accepting applications for three \$400 scholarships.

Candidates must be a full-time student and either an unmarried child, spouse, or dependent of a Division member, active for at least one year (not Agency Shop). Only one scholarship will be awarded per member family per year, no student may win in two consecutive

years, and each student has a maximum of five years of eligibility (not necessarily consecutive), based on the number of actual submissions made by the student.

Click here for the application and submit the required information to Mike McCulloch (DOT 8th Floor), 315-785-7961 by noon on Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2025. The drawing will be held at 12:30 p.m. on Oct. 15.

## Roswell Park scholarships winners announced

Division 196 at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo selected 22 recipients for \$500 scholarships.

The winners are:

- Kathleen Beck, dependent of Amy Beck, attending RIT.
- Lillian Bromstead, dependent of Shiloh Bromstead, attending Penn West Edinboro.
- Gavin Caruana, dependent of Matthew Caruana, attending Niagara U.
- Angela Daniels, dependent of Lyubov Daniels, attending UB.
- Landyn Desmarais, dependent of Bryan Desmarais, attending UB.
- Cheyenne Gilinger, dependent of Christina Gilinger, attending Daemen.
- Joshua Gleason, dependent of Denise Gleason, attending Clarkson U.
- Carson Guise, dependent of Lynne Guise, attending RIT.
- Hannah Hiscock, dependent of Melissa Hiscock, attending UB.
- Erik Ronald Holtz, dependent of Michele Holtz, attending Hilbert.
- Xiyuan Li, dependent of Yandong Chen, attending D'Youville.
- Gianni Malizia, dependent of Jennifer Malizia, attending UB.

- Ryan Moran-Vaughn, dependent of Courtney Kelchlin, attending Hilbert.
- Riley O'Donnell, dependent of Kristen Sikora, attending SUNY Fredonia.
- Zachario O'Neill, dependent of Colleen LoFaro-O'Neill, attending UB.
- Shafin Rahman, dependent of Nazia Rahman, attending UB.
- Glenn Rath, dependent of Cathryn Rath, attending UB.
- Owen Redfern, dependent of Jill Redfern, attending Niagara U.
- Paige Venohr, dependent of Kimberly Venohr, attending Buff State.
- Hannah Walter, dependent of Ashley Williams, attending UB.
- Benjamin Wypij, dependent of Heather Wypij, attending UAlbany.
- Jonathan Wypij, dependent of Heather Wypij, attending Alfred State.

Congratulations to all the winners and a reminder to check our Scholarships page often, where we list the latest opportunities available for PEF members and their dependents. If you are a Council Leader with a scholarship to share, please contact us at [Communicator@pef.org](mailto:Communicator@pef.org).



Eight new Executive Board members were sworn in at the start of the September board meeting. Left to right: Adam Warrenchak, Bradley Rosen, Biswajit Datta, Alexandre Donascimento, Laurie Kail, Angelina Rodriguez, Kristina Tereburke, Jill Poeller. Thank you for stepping up to represent your union family!

# Executive Board focuses on Contract, Convention, Legislation

**By NAJEE WALKER**

The PEF Executive Board met for its quarterly meeting on September 18 and 19 in Albany. With one month to go before the 47th annual Convention in Lake Placid, the meeting focused on the union's convention plans, upcoming contract negotiations, the future of Civil Service, and membership engagement and finances.

## **Appointments and retirements**

At the start of the meeting, PEF President Wayne Spence acknowledged eight new Executive Board members: Adam Warrenchak, Bradley Rosen, Biswajit Datta, Alexandre Donascimento, Laurie Kail, Angelina Rodriguez, Kristina Tereburke and Jill Poeller. All eight members were sworn in at the meeting.

President Spence also announced the retirement of two members, Sabu Cherian, a Vocational Instructor 2 at DOCCS Green Haven Correctional Facility, and Steve Drake, an Education Supervisor at DOCCS Mohawk Correctional Facility. Drake was one of the PEF representatives tapped to work on reforms to the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement (HALT) Act following the wildcat DOCCS strike in March.

Drake cited the strike and the culture at DOCCS as a reason for choosing to retire now.

"It really was a difficult decision, and it isn't something I decided on quickly," Drake told the board. "But with the way things are going and after the DOCCS strike, I do not see myself continuing on with the agency."



President Spence echoed Drake's sentiments. Although many states are experiencing issues with their criminal justice systems, President Spence said that conditions in New York correctional facilities remain dire.

"We have to make sure that everyone who works behind the walls—whether they are an incarcerated individual or people who work there—are safe," said President Spence. "We have to look at the issue at DOCCS from various perspectives."

Following the retirement announcements, President Spence introduced PEF's new General Counsel John Svare and Deputy General Counsel, Alison Thorne. Svare was promoted from deputy after former General Counsel Ed Greene accepted a legal position with the Public Employment Relations Board.

## Vacancy filled

An election was held on the floor to fill a vacancy to the Policial Action Advisory Executive Committee (PAAEC). The vacant seat was held by Vincent Cicatello, who can no longer serve now that he is Region 1 Coordinator.

After two rounds of voting, the board elected Keith Browne, an Assistant Environmental Engineer at the DEC, to the position.

## COPE and Membership Engagement

COPE (Committee on Political Education) Coordinator Don Morgenstern informed delegates they and their constituents can now contribute to PEF's federal lobbying efforts via the PEF app.

"The new COPE button under Resources on the app leads to information, forms and sign-up sheets," said Morgenstern. "Hopefully, this should make COPE much easier, now that it is entirely electronic and online."

Morgenstern said that PEF's international parent union SEIU has raised expectations for the union, given PEF's success in growing its membership.

"More members mean more money," said Morgenstern. "Thankfully, we have seen increases in both."

COPE contributions increased by nearly 10% last year and total contributions sit at just over \$203,000. A regional breakdown shows that PEF Region 2 leads with the most contributions, with 9 percent of the region's members contributing. COPE is the only way PEF contributes to lobbying on the federal level, which is more important than ever given the current anti-union sentiment in Washington, D.C.

PEF Organizing Director Scott Harms then updated the board on the union's membership engagement efforts.

"Trends show that our efforts to increase membership are working, and thanks to hiring at agencies, we are bringing a lot of new members in," said Harms. "Organizing does need everyone's help to make sure that we are not missing any potential new members. It is important that we remain vigilant and reach out to all new employees when they first start work."

As of Sept. 8, 2025, the number of active dues-paying members is 55,270 – that's a member density of 91.4 percent. But as the union's membership grows, so does the number of non-members. Outside organizations continue to try to deceive members into opting out of PEF. Harms stressed that the union has protocols in place to try and prevent opt outs.

"We average about eight opt outs per month and continue to do a tremendous job at preventing these efforts," said Harms. "We continue to look at different trends and come up with new ways to combat these efforts to harm our union."

Finally, Harms delivered news about a [combined PEF membership and COPE contribution application](#).

"Following guidance we received from our parent unions, we designed a one-page combined membership and COPE application," said Harms. "By having both the membership and COPE applications

on the same page, experience has shown that we will get more people to sign up for COPE."

An [electronic version of the paper form](#) exists as well, making signing up new members easier across multiple platforms. All new membership kits mailed to bargaining unit employees contain the updated form.

## Contract Telephone Townhall and NY HELPS Update

President Spence hosted a [Telephone Town Hall](#) on Sept. 10 to update members on the status of the New York Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide (NY HELPS) program and contract negotiations.

NY HELPS is set to end in June 2026. At the Executive Board meeting, PEF Civil Service Enforcement and Research Director Veronica Foley said that NY HELPS was presented by the State as a temporary recruitment solution following the COVID pandemic. PEF is concerned that new "transformation" plans degrade our merit and fitness protections further.

"This potential move forward would expand the use of training and experience (T&E) evaluations," said Foley. "But it walks, looks like, and talks like NY HELPS. Like NY HELPS, this plan is not codified in law and runs counter to our State's Constitutional mandate of competitive examinations."

PEF has never had an issue with T&Es, and many PEF members were hired through NY HELPS in the last few years. PEF is concerned, however, that moving away from competitive examinations puts civil servants and the New Yorkers they serve at risk. Members are urged to contact the NYS Department of Civil Service via [PEF's digital letter-writing campaign](#).

[FACT SHEET: Why PEF opposed NY HELPS and the State's plan to change the Civil Service system](#)

President Spence also spoke to the board about the union's contract. PEF sent a demand-to-bargain letter to the Office of Employee Relations (OER) suggesting dates to begin bargaining for the next contract. PEF's current contract with the state ends on April 2, 2026.

The response PEF received from OER stated that because of federal budget cuts and the recent "One Big Beautiful Bill" Act passed by the U.S. House and Senate, the state is not ready to begin negotiations as they are unsure what the state budget will look like.

In response, PEF offered to commence negotiations on "non-economic" items, like accruals and sick time. President Spence said that by tackling these items ahead of wage increases and cost-of-living adjustments, the union stands to gain momentum and be ready to negotiate the rest of the contract when OER has a better sense of the state's financial outlook.

"The point is to get moving now," said President Spence. "Our team is trained and ready to negotiate. We know that wages and other economic increases are important—they are always important—but we have an opportunity to get the ball rolling and keep it rolling by beginning on whatever items we can. This is our strategy."

## PEF financial report

“I am proud to report that PEF has never been in a better financial position than it is now,” PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue told the board. “The unbelievable accomplishments by the Organizing Department have increased our dues paying members and the fiscal strength of our union.”

As the third quarter of this year began, Secretary Donahue reported total income for the union at \$2,059,491. He anticipates revenue rising as more members join PEF.

“While it is still early to project, we predict that revenue will continue to grow as we bring more members into the union and as we continue to stop opt-out attempts,” said Donahue.

Some budget items were approaching a 10 percent over-budget threshold, but Secretary Donahue said that recommendations for budget amendments were not necessary at this time.

## Legislative update

The Executive Board approved both the State and Federal Legislative Agendas for 2026 to be debated and voted on by Convention delegates next month in Lake Placid

PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio, who chairs the union’s Statewide Political Action Committee, then updated the board on PEF-supported bills that were signed into law by Governor Hochul and bills that still await the Governor’s signature before the end of the year

“The first bill that we advocated for that passed was a bill on Artificial Intelligence (AI),” she said. “This bill put guard rails in place related to how AI is being used in the state workforce and agencies.”

Another law passed by the Governor cited by VP DiAntonio expands workers’ compensation benefits to include mental injury, and a third calls for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to develop heat mitigation plans in their old facilities, some of which can reach over 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer months

There are a number of bills still awaiting the Governor’s signature, including the LOADiNG Act, which expands the guard rails around AI to SUNY, CUNY and municipal governments, and a bill which would expand the number of days for paid leave for public employees performing military duties from 30 to 60.

“There are also ongoing efforts to introduce new Tier 6 legislation,” said Vice President DiAntonio. “As many of you know, we are working in coalition with other unions to equalize the pension system.

In closing, Vice President DiAntonio shared that the budget outlook for New York State looks shaky, with about \$10-15 billion in federal funding cuts likely

“Thirty-eight percent of our entire state budget comes from the federal government. That’s about \$90 billion,” she said. “We are expecting reductions to Medicaid and SNAP, which our members help administer for the people of New York. And we are expecting education funding cuts in the billions. This could affect all of our lives and the things we’re fighting for in our next contract.

New York does have a rainy day fund to cover potential losses, but how much of that money will be used to sustain specific services whose funding gets cut by the federal government is yet to be determined. In the meantime, PEF members are encouraged to stay informed via the [union’s website](#), where they can also record a testimonial sharing with State lawmakers the impact federal cuts will have on the services they provide and the communities they live in.

## Other business

The Convention Committee presented their agenda for the [47th Annual Convention](#), which will take place Oct. 19-22 in Lake Placid, N.Y. The board voted to approve the proposed agenda as presented with no changes. The three-day gathering will feature the most delegates in years – 731 as of this writing – who will set the agenda for the union in the year ahead.

The Executive Board also voted to approve the Divisions Committee recommendation from five unrepresented members at SUNY Alfred who petitioned to join PEF Division 201.

On the second day of the meeting, Sept. 19, President Spence invited A.J. Ali, the founder and CEO of “[L.O.V.E. is the Answer](#),” to address the body. President Spence attended one of Ali’s workshops while at the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) conference earlier this summer. Ali’s life philosophy focuses on learning, openness, volunteering and empowerment. Spence believes that the slow movement of government agencies—like OMH, DOCCS, OCFS and others—to address the health and wellbeing of its workforce, means that the union must step in and via things like the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) learn how to address issues for themselves.



AJ Ali, found of L.O.V.E. is the Answer presents to the PEF Executive Board on September 19.

“Why would we try to take training from people who do not understand what we’re experiencing?” he asked the board. “We need to help ourselves and we need to figure this out for ourselves because we’re the ones experiencing these issues.”

The program and workshops pioneered by Ali have been used at law enforcement agencies across the country. President Spence invited the Executive Board to introduce Ali’s programs at Labor Management and Health and Safety meetings to begin addressing ways to improve the mental and physical health of staff.

The next PEF Executive Board meeting will be held December 4 and 5 in Albany.



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# PEF brings together labor, management for training on workers' comp

By KATE STICKLES

The rights of injured PEF members under the Workers' Compensation Law and the PEF Contract can be confusing for everyone involved, including state agency personnel, so the PEF Health and Safety Department recently held an interactive two-day training conference for both labor and management representatives.

The program offered an in-depth study of the rights and benefits available to members, Civil Service procedures for agency personnel, and methods to improve the ability to quickly return injured employees to work. The program was funded through the NYS/PEF Contract Article 18 Committee, co-chaired by PEF Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham and PEF Region 9 Coordinator Gabriela Franklyn, and Edward Cottrell of the state Office of Employee Relations (OER).

Training topics included how to file for workers' compensation, contractual benefits, use of accruals, waiting periods, controverted claims, temporary and permanent disability benefits, medical benefits, payment of wages, Civil Service law provisions, return to work and light duty assignments.

Panelists included Geraldine Stella, PEF Director of Health and Safety; Ed Aluck, PEF Contract Administration attorney; Edward Cottrell, Assistant Director of the OER; and workers' compensation attorneys Alex Dell and Robert Grey. Subject-matter experts from the Department of Civil Service, the New York State Insurance Fund, and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) also participated in the panel.

Cottrell said management shares the same view as PEF, wanting employees to know what their benefits are and getting people back to work as quickly as possible.

"The state values all employees," he said, adding that PEF members do some of the most physically and emotionally challenging jobs out there. "PEF Health & Safety delivered this program two years ago to state managers and union representatives, and ever since then agency personnel have been asking for more – they loved it."

Throughout the day, Stella and the attorneys guided attendees through a case study, delving into each step of the process, from injury to return to work.

"This program goes way beyond just the basics of workers' compensation," Stella said. "We want to give both labor and agency

personnel the best information possible so that our members are getting benefits quicker, services more easily, and have a smoother return to work. We give them a training binder that is a detailed resource guide participants will be using regularly – just about any question they get will be answered in that binder. We're training both the union reps and state agency personnel - no one else is doing a program like this, and we are really proud of it."

A union-only pre-conference was held on day one for PEF leaders and staff to prepare them for representing injured workers. Topics included basics of workers' comp, where PEF members get benefits, working with the PEF H&S Department, strategies for health and safety and labor/management committees, and communicating back to members.

"This was the first time we were able to bring union leaders and staff together before the full training. It was a great way to take a deep dive into the problems and questions PEF leaders and field representatives get from injured members," said Article 18 Co-Chair Leisa Abraham.

"Leaders and staff came away with concrete tools to help injured PEF members, and to advocate for safety changes," added Article 18 Co-Chair Gabriela Franklyn.

PEF President Wayne Spence shared his experience with workers' comp at the pre-conference, telling PEF leaders: "New York State does not notify us when a member is injured on the job or out because of that injury. It is crucial that you keep in touch with that member, and let us know about it. We can fight for better safety on the job when we know what is causing our members to get hurt."

Stella stressed the importance of passing on that information.

"Get that information to us through your field rep, or email us directly at [HealthAndSafety@pef.org](mailto:HealthAndSafety@pef.org)," she said. "We'll get comp information out to the member quickly and work with them to answer any questions."

For information about workers' compensation, PEF has compiled several resources available on the union's website. [Click here](#) and then scroll down and select Workers' Compensation.





PEF President Wayne Spence, at podium, is joined by (left to right) Vice Presidents Bruce Giddings and Darlene Williams, Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue, and Vice President Randi DiAntonio at the memorial outside PEF headquarters on Sept. 11, 2025.

# Leaders, staff honor memory of members killed on 9-11

**By KATE STICKLES**

PEF leaders, members, and staff honored the memories of members who were killed in the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York City, observing a moment of silence and reading off each of the names.

"Today, we join with our fellow Americans to honor their memory with a moment of silence, a tribute to lives cut short but never forgotten," said President Wayne Spence. "The attacks were meant to break our spirit, weaken our values, and shake our democracy. I think they failed. Instead, it brought us together."

President Spence said in the days and months that followed, PEF stood shoulder-to-shoulder with members and their families, helping them face unimaginable grief while navigating painful challenges with benefits, insurance, and support.

"There were no bodies, sometimes for months," he said. "No one should have to worry about being able to pay their bills while

dealing with this grief. PEF staff and the PEF Membership Benefits Program mobilized to help our members' families."

The union holds a ceremony each year outside PEF headquarters in Latham, N.Y., at a memorial wall inscribed with the names of those who died that day or in the ensuing years from sicknesses related to the falling towers. Most of the PEF members who died were from the Department of Taxation and Finance and two members were from other agencies. This year, Secretary Treasurer Joe Donahue, and Vice Presidents Randi DiAntonio, Bruce Giddings, and Darlene Williams had the solemn task of reading the names.

"The years may pass, but our memories endure," said President Spence. "We will never forget."



## Special election balloting seats 4 new Eboard members; next round of petitioning begins October 6

Four contested Executive Board seats went to balloting following the July Special Election cycle and the results are now in.

Bradley Rosen was elected to **Seat 1**, representing certain members at the Department of Agriculture and Markets; Adam Warrenchak was elected to **Seat 9**, representing certain members at Audit Control; Laurie Kail was elected to **Seat 245**, representing certain members at the Department of Labor; and Alexandre Donascimento was elected to **Seat 260**, representing certain members at the Office of Mental Health.

The next Special Election cycle begins with the start of petitioning on October 6 and ends October 28. Having a full Executive Board ensures all members are represented and eligible members are encouraged to get involved.

The following Executive Board seats will be up for election this cycle:

- Seat 15 – Civil Service
- Seat 30 – Department of Corrections & Community Supervision
- Seat 127 – Homeland Security
- Seat 161 – Executive
- Seat 180 – Department of Health
- Seat 220 – Worker's Compensation Board
- Seat 325 – Office of Mental Health
- Seat 460 – Department of State

Visit [www.pef.org/elections](http://www.pef.org/elections) for information and petitions.



## PEF in the News

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### Sept. 11 ceremony featured on Spectrum News

PEF held its annual Sept. 11 memorial ceremony, honoring and remembering the 34 members who were killed in the terrorist attacks in New York City. [Click here](#) for a story on remembrances across the region, featuring PEF's event at the union's headquarters in Latham.



### President Spence recognized for labor contributions

Two prominent listings of top labor leaders recently featured President Wayne Spence.

*The New York CaribNews* honored President Spence as one of its Jamaica Power 100 and named him one of the country's top labor leaders. [Read the article here.](#)

*City & State* also ranked him No. 13 on its "Labor Power 100." The list features New York's most influential union leaders and worker advocates. [You can read that article here.](#)



### State Education Department leader writes newspaper commentary

PEF member Aaron Noble, a senior historian at the New York State Museum and the assistant council leader of PEF Division 194, authored a commentary in the *Albany Times Union* on the damage the Trump Administration is doing to cultural education by gutting funding and dictating programming at world-class museums. His essay echoes PEF's legislative request for an increase in the Cultural Education Fee that is charged on property deed transfers in New York. The \$15 fee has not increased since 2002. [Read the article here.](#)

# Fighting for a secure retirement for all

By **JIM CARR**

We are currently living in an historically dangerous time for our Democracy, freedom of speech and our social safety system. Our public institutions are under attack from a Project 2025 agenda which is anti-American, anti-union, anti-affordable healthcare and pro-authoritarianism.

As a senior citizen and union activist, I believe all Americans should support freedom of speech, public education, public servants, affordable and quality healthcare, and our basic rights as Americans guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.

We are witnessing attacks on the rule of law, free speech, the Constitution, the media - anyone considered an "enemy" by our current president is under threat of harassment and even unjustified indictments. This is not the America I love and believe in! I believe in transparency, accountability, responsibility and the rule of law. These are the most fundamental values often lacking in government. I believe in educating myself and these words late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall spoke when [accepting the prestigious Liberty Medal](#) from the National Constitution Center on July 4, 1992:

*"Democracy just cannot flourish amid fear. Liberty cannot bloom amid hate. Justice cannot take root amid rage. America must get to work. In the chill climate in which we live, we must go against the prevailing wind. We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent from the apathy. We must dissent from the fear, the hatred and the mistrust. ... We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better."*

I choose to promote Justice Marshall's views because I agree with him. My opinion is mine alone and you also have the right to choose your direction. If you are not like-minded, I believe in the Constitution and your right to choose a different path. I can only hope that your support of current events and leadership are well founded and will not negatively impact our democracy. There is a lot under attack, including Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, the Affordable Care Act, institutions of higher learning, and your right to speak freely about our government.

As retirees, we advocate for a "secure retirement for all." Here are some examples from our friends at the Alliance for Retired Americans of how seniors impact our economy, from a recent edition of the Monday Alert.

### **50+ Longevity Economy – National and New York**

- 83% of U.S. household wealth is held by people over 50.
- Access to credit and assets allows the group to spend more on goods, services and investments than their younger counterparts.

- When summed together, approximately \$1.8 trillion in federal, state and local taxes were attributable to the Longevity Economy in 2018 and it will quadruple by 2050.
  - About 43% of federal tax revenue (\$1.4 trillion)
  - And 37% of state and local tax revenue collected in the U.S. (\$650 billion)

Spending by people aged 50 and over in the U.S. in 2018 supported:

- More than 88.6 million jobs (44% of total employment)
- Over \$4.7 trillion in labor income
- 61% off all U.S. jobs and 43% of labor income was related to spending by the 50+ cohort
- Accounts for a majority of the spending in several categories of goods and services including:
  - Healthcare
  - Nondurable goods
  - Durable goods, utilities
  - Motor vehicles and parts
  - Financial services
  - Household goods
- Overall contribution – economic and unpaid activities - \$9 trillion in 2018
- 50+ also accounts for the majority of:
  - Volunteering
  - Philanthropy
  - Entrepreneurs
  - Donation activities in the U.S.
  - Large tourism block

### **50+ Longevity - New York**

- 36% of population in New York is 50+
- Contribute 43%, or \$719 billion to the GDP
- Support 5.9 million jobs
- Generated \$482 billion in wages and salary
- Contribute \$72 billion in state and local taxes (39% of total)

### **Combating ageism and stereotypes – Social, economic and intellectual capital of older population**

New York's total population is over 19 million and the state ranks fourth in the nation in the number of adults over 60 (4.84 million).

- 80% of New York State Retirement System payouts stay in New York - \$10.6 billion annually; other pensions - \$30.5 billion.
- Social Security - \$59 billion annually paid to New York State older adults
- 900,000 individuals age 60+ contribute 442 million hours of service at an economic value of \$13.2 billion.
- 64% of individuals age 60+ who own their own home have no mortgage.
- 4.1 million caregivers at any time in a year – economic value if paid for at market rate - is \$39 billion, with the average age of 64.

God Bless America, our union PEF, and retirees from all walks of life!

# 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.

Lynette Ambrose is a training specialist 1 at Western New York DDSO in West Seneca.

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.

Kevin Bromley is a registered nurse 1 with the Office for 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.

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.

Alex Frye is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

Amber Fulton is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

Naomi Gillespie (Jusino) is a tax technician 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Albany.

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

Kathryn Hampton is a human rights specialist 2 at the Division of Human Rights in Brooklyn.

Julia Hargens is a registered nurse 1 as SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

Kathleen Hill is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

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

Nina Ledkovsky is a registered nurse 1 at Green Haven Correctional Facility in Stormville.

Kimberly MacDuff is a taxpayer services specialist trainee 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Albany.

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

Lee Moore is an auditor 2 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Syracuse.

Alexis Mosher is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

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

Adrienne Nicholson is a Medicaid eligibility examiner 3 at the Department of Health in Albany.

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.

Nicole Skaros-Marcello is a training specialist 1 at OPWDD Western New York DDSO in West Seneca.

Harold Stone is an investigative specialist 1 in the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement, Department of Health in Syracuse.

Sabrina Vaccarello is a registered nurse supervisor 1 at SUNY Stony Brook on Long Island.

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.

Jen Wolcott-Dean is a vocational instructor 4 at Wyoming Correctional Facility in Attica.

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



The rules for making and receiving leave donations (*such as leave recipients may not have had any disciplinary actions or unsatisfactory performance evaluations within their last three years of state employment*) are set forth on pages 174 and 175 of the [2023-26 PS&T Contract](#). If you, or a PEF member you know, need leave donations because of a medical issue, you may contact *The Communicator* to request publication of that need. Send requests to [communicator@pef.org](mailto:communicator@pef.org), or call 518-785-1900.



September 26, 2025

PEF statewide officers and other elected regional leaders joined 85 PEF members from Regions 2, 3, 4 and 5 for a beautiful sunset cruise on Seneca Lake.



September 17, 2025

PEF and management came together to take a deep dive into workers' compensation benefits through the contract and under the law. Funding for the program is provided through Article 18 of the NYS/PEF contract.



September 12, 2025

The Chapter 7 Acting PEF Retirees President Lyndon Jones hosted the last of three Region 7 Retirees luncheons at the River Trail Restaurant in Saranac Lake. Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky stopped by to thank the retirees for their political activism and other efforts. They discussed health Insurance benefits, COLA's, pension reform, and the upcoming convention in Lake Placid.



September 26, 2025

The PEF Hispanic Committee welcomed members from across the State to the NYC office, in person and via Zoom, to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and learn about the Workers' Compensation process.



September 22, 2025

Host Region 7 delegates met this weekend to get ready for welcoming PEF to Lake Placid, Oct. 19-22. Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky reports her region will have 36 people attend, counting delegates and volunteers.



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

