

Vol. 43

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Stronger Roots,
Bolder Future.

2025 PEF Convention

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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



Charting the course for PEF's bold future, together

PEF members filled the 1932 Olympic ice rink in Lake Placid in October for the 47th annual PEF Convention, setting state and federal legislative agendas, debating resolutions to govern our union, and building even stronger roots for a bolder PEF future.

In my [State of the Union address](#) I looked back at some of our biggest victories together this year, like saving SUNY Downstate and the historic \$1.1 billion investment in the backbone of health care in central Brooklyn. As we move into the end of the year and beyond, PEF is well positioned to achieve even more success on behalf of its members.

We are participating in [talks about transforming the Civil Service system](#) as the state is poised to end the NY HELPS program in June 2026. We have joined the conversation at the ground level, with an eye toward ensuring that merit and fitness don't fall by the wayside. Our members are highly skilled professionals, and we want to make sure the people who serve New York are qualified and not subject to political cronyism.

For this issue, we also spoke with several members at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) who work as [teachers in youth facilities](#). We listened to the difficulties they face serving this vulnerable population. Short-staffing at OCFS, coupled with stagnant pay, highlights a problem most agencies face – an inability to recruit and retain employees. To achieve any change, we need member engagement, and I encourage you to reach out to your field rep and let us know what you are experiencing. We can't act without facts. Just call your regional office to be connected.

Engaging with the union secured a [recent win for a member at the Department of Transportation](#) when the state installed a surveillance camera outside their private property claiming a need to investigate whether she was running her personal business on state time. That member knew her family's rights were being infringed upon, so she spoke out and PEF obtained a favorable opinion from an administrative law judge.

Stay tuned to PEF.org, your email, social media, and the PEF app, as we enter open enrollment season for several PEF benefits, including the [Productivity Enhancement Program \(PEP\)](#) and [Flexible Spending Accounts \(FSA\)](#), both now open through December 8.

It's going to get busy quickly in the New Year, with contract negotiations and the fallout from federal budget cuts on the horizon. An informed and engaged membership is our strongest tool to effect change and better the lives of our members.

In Unity,

A stylized, 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



Participants in the Civil Service Roundtable including PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio, PEF Director of Civil Service Research and Enforcement Veronica Foley and PEF Region 1 Coordinator Vince Ciatello pose for photo in Buffalo Common Council Chamber.

Civil Service roundtables spotlight recruitment and retention and concerns about NY HELPS

By **NAJEE WALKER**

A series of roundtables hosted by New York State Senator Robert Jackson were held last month in New York City, Albany and Buffalo. Senator Jackson chairs the Civil Service and Pensions Committee. The committee invited representatives from organized labor, as well as directors from the Department of Civil Service (DCS), Human Resource offices, and elected officials to participate in the discussions around how civil service works when applied to the local level.

Discussions ranged in topics from classifications, hiring and promotions, to civil service examinations. At the local level many of the policies, rules and regulations that are created by DCS must be followed by local county and city employers, like water treatment facilities.

Employers at the local level raised the question of employment barriers, like residency requirements, which can prevent someone who does not live in a certain geographical area from getting a job in civil service and expressed concerns regarding the cap on wages for retirees. Local governments discussed changes to state laws that would remove the cap on wages for retirees who re-enter the civil service workforce.



PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio and PEF Director of Civil Service Research and Enforcement Veronica Foley address a group of municipal employers at Civil Service Roundtable in Buffalo on October 29, 2025.

The roundtable also discussed the use of NY HELPS, the temporary DCS initiative which waived civil service exams for thousands of positions to address a statewide staffing crisis. It is set to expire in June 2026. Representatives from local government praised NY HELPS for giving them an avenue for offering permanent appointments to civil servants who have been in provisional appointments for years.

“The high number of provisionals in state and local government are the result of poor exam planning on the part of the Department of Civil Service,” said Veronica Foley, PEF’s Director of Civil Service Enforcement and Research. “NY HELPS was initially proposed as a way for the State to reinforce their testing program, but in reality promotion exams have been diminished and access to exams has not yet improved.”

Participants at the meetings felt that little information has been shared with all stakeholders about plans for recruitment and retention efforts once NY HELPS ends. PEF and other unions know that the State wants to eliminate written exams for open competitive titles and replace them with Training and Experience evaluations. PEF argues that no details have been shared with stakeholders regarding how this form of examination will be competitive.

PEF opposes a blanket transformation away from competitive examinations and believes that it is against New York’s mandate to uphold merit and fitness-based hiring practices that safeguard against cronyism.

As DCS continues to push for changes that PEF believes will erode the current merit and fitness practices, PEF does support DCS in opening regional computer-based testing centers. DCS claimed in May 2025 that 12 sites would be opened by March 2027 and that four would be open for prototype testing by the end of summer 2025. As of November 2025, no testing sites are operational.

PEF also supports the State’s plan to implement a job application management system that will help streamline the hiring process and reduce the time between taking an exam and being hired. Lastly, PEF is eagerly awaiting the results of the Total Compensation Study that the State has conducted. Foley said PEF looks forward to reviewing its recommendations that the union hopes will aid in retaining workers.

“DCS must do better when it comes to communication and addressing systemic failures in ways that uphold merit and fitness, not erode it. The stakeholders at the roundtables agreed with us on this point in particular,” said Foley. “We hope that the roundtable made clear not only PEF’s position but also the concerns that the decisions being made at DCS are being made without the input of major stakeholders.”



Office of Children and Family Services

Educating is more than a career: Teachers at OCFS face challenges with passion and drive

By KATE STICKLES

Teaching can be a challenge in any setting, but for PEF teachers in Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) youth secure centers, the student demographic is unique, and their needs are varied. We interviewed several teachers in Department of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth facilities to get an inside look at what they do every day for the sometimes-forgotten youth of New York.

**Jason Courrege, Bureau of Youth Academics and Scholarship,
Content Curriculum Coordinator**

A joy of learning propelled 10-year PEF member Jason Courrege into a teaching career.

In 2010, he joined the teaching staff at Red Hook Residential Center, eventually becoming the education administrator before it shuttered in 2021. He then moved to Brookwood Secure Center where he oversaw the college program, and now he works as the content curriculum coordinator for social studies at the Bureau of Youth Academics and Scholarship.

"I created a passion of understanding the U.S. Constitution and learning from our past," he said. "Through my joy of learning I get to teach students about the lives of others who came before us and how to apply their life lessons."

OCFS students are unique and bring their own challenges.

"Our students come from all across New York state, ages 13 to 21," Courrege said. "Many are students of color and feel disenfranchised from the system that locked them up. The common demographic between many of our students is socio-economic neglect. I characterize our students as 'reluctant learners.' Overall, our students

have not been successful in the public-school setting and typically view education as an annoyance and something they never have succeeded at."

Teachers at OCFS strive to find ways to build a supportive system of success, so students feel and see their accomplishments and are empowered to focus on high school graduation.

"Teaching our reluctant learners is the most fulfillment I have ever received professionally," Courrege said. "Watching young people achieve their goals, that they believed they would never have the chance to achieve, is worth all the stress and hard work of educating them."

The work is made harder by lack of space and tools at OCFS facilities.

"Because of strict safety protocols, certain educational activities and materials can't be used within the facility," Courrege said. "There are many challenges providing educational services in a secure or limited secure facility – the biggest is lack of security staff. We also suffer from the lack of having certified teachers in all core areas, so teachers are required to teach outside of their discipline."

Academic grouping is also a challenge when students are grouped based on safety and not academic ability or grade level, requiring teachers to teach multiple levels at once. Teachers have nicknamed this the "one -room schoolhouse" model, Courrege said. Regardless of the difficulties, teachers at OCFS facilities are vital to the success of these youth.

"Many of our students do not have the proper adult supports or supports from their local community," Courrege said. "They see themselves in our facility as the last stop of a long juvenile justice

process. It is important that we help these students learn to read and build critical thinking skills and make the right choices, so they have a healthy, productive and safe life.

"I always teach my students any goal is met by steps," he said. "The steps for our students to have a better life are passing five Regents exams and getting a high school diploma. If they pass their Regents, they are taking steps to save their future lives."

The best part of the job?

"Students and teachers create a strong rapport," said Courrage, "allowing students to build trust with a professional to help them address their academic deficiencies while learning to maintain healthy relationships that will lead to long term success outside the facility."

Tim Maroney, Brentwood Residential Center, Dix Hills

Having the opportunity to engage youth and make a difference in their lives motivates Tim Maroney every day as he walks into the Brentwood Residential Center in Dix Hills. Maroney has been a PEF member for three years and works with young people ages 12 to 18 who often come from highly traumatic backgrounds and have significant gaps in their education.

"Approximately 40% of the population (at Brentwood) have special education services," he said. "I went into teaching to support students in reaching their potential and becoming contributing members of society. I am able to provide meaningful instruction and life lessons they can use throughout their lives."

Education in OCFS facilities means the students generally come from higher levels of trauma and emotional dysregulation, which impacts their behavior and ability to function in an academic setting, Maroney said.

With high turnover at OCFS facilities, largely due to what teachers say are salaries far below public-school teachers, educators face an uphill battle to provide quality teaching.

"Youth from ages 12 to 18 are all grouped into one classroom setting which creates challenges in lesson plan prep and implementation," Maroney said. "We have limited access to basic necessities, such as technology, paper, toner, and other resources. Our staff share very small areas, sometimes four teachers work in one small room. We also have significant behavioral issues which impact learning and overall safety."

Despite the challenges, Maroney says teaching these kids is rewarding.

"Everyone makes mistakes and deserves a second chance," he said. "Many have given up on these kids, and they deserve better than what we are providing. Teachers, especially in state facilities, are underappreciated. We are here to make a difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable kids in New York State."

"We need more program options, music, vocation, addiction services, community support," Maroney said. "Teachers are the front-line responders here and need to be supported appropriately."

Donald O'Shea, Highland Residential Center, Highland

While the students who come through Highland Residential Center are mostly "trauma informed," they are students first to teachers like Donald O'Shea, a seven-year PEF member, council leader at Highland Residential, and first time PEF Convention delegate.

"I came into teaching because I was inspired by the dedication of adults who put themselves in a place to work with youth," O'Shea said. "Given the right environment, teachers have an amazing altruistic capacity to witness, engage and motivate youth. I can envision no better place to have an impact than with our youth."

At Highland Residential, O'Shea is the sole Social Studies teacher for students ranging from middle school grade levels to Global History (9th and 10th grades), U.S. History (11th grade) and Participation in Government and Economics (12th grade).

There are numerous challenges OCFS teachers face, and not all of them stem from the student population.

"We encounter staffing shortages due to a limited number of teachers as well as unit staff," O'Shea said. "We have faced challenges filling these roles because of the lower salaries in comparison to public school educators. We also lack advancement incentives, such as positions as department head or compensation for continuing education."

"We are always asked to do more with less," he said. "Unlike other titles, we do not receive hazard pay, even though we are considered essential, and we do not enjoy the same benefits as other employees like overtime opportunities, incentives, meals."

While a public-school educator might take having a phone for granted, OCFS teachers are not permitted to have cell phones. Transportation to the units or the ability to move students is challenging.

"We are required to customize students' learning based on their grade levels within classes of 14 or 15, while also catering to the needs of special education students," O'Shea said. "Just carrying materials can be burdensome, and depending on the conditions in the units, such as haircuts, counseling or codes, we must stay flexible. We are limited in our access to many of the resources that public school teachers can use."

Providing students with engagement and learning opportunities is crucial to their success.

"As a social studies teacher looking to the future of a civic-minded society, providing our students with the opportunity to continue to engage and learn cannot be understated," O'Shea said. "Sometimes just stating, 'Good morning' or asking, 'How are you?' has that positive effect that builds relationships enough for trust, safety and learning to thrive."

"If it were up to me, I would flood this place with teachers, youth counselors, guidance counselors and social workers and provide one-on-one tutoring," he said. "Forgive me for stating it, but we have a captive audience."

Karen Surgeary, Brentwood Residential Center, Dix Hills

Nine-year PEF member and Brentwood Residential Social Studies/ELA teacher Karen Surgeary, said her students are girls with severe trauma that impacts their learning abilities.

"OCFS students have large gaps in their learning, and their academics have been negatively impacted by mental health challenges and unstable family settings," Surgeary said. "Some are victims of rape or sex trafficking, many have witnessed domestic abuse, and drug and alcohol abuse in the home."

Centers like Brentwood Residential Center afford an environment that recognizes those needs.

"Our students are surrounded by Youth Support Staff every day while they are in school for their own safety," she said. "They must follow a specific program that includes wearing a uniform, following directives, completing schoolwork, and participating in a reward system."

"Many of our students are hesitant to learn new subjects because of low self-esteem," Surgeary said. "They need positive reinforcement daily. As teachers, we are tasked with motivating our students, reading their emotions, and giving individualized attention throughout class periods."

Short on staff, this can be challenging, especially when teachers are also sometimes faced with blatant disrespect, foul language, and poor behavioral patterns.

"As OCFS teachers, we are tasked with trying to maintain a cohesive learning environment while also maintaining a sense of safety," Surgeary said. "If students begin yelling or fighting, we support their staff by calling codes and escorting other students back to their rooms."

Despite these challenges, Surgeary said, making even the smallest difference in a student's life and showing them they can learn and succeed makes it worthwhile.

"Our students come to us with a myriad of problems," she said. "When we can help them academically, they see the results in their grades and Regents scores. When our students see academic improvement, they feel more confident in themselves and their abilities."

If the state wants to bring more teachers into OCFS facilities to best serve the population, they must better compensate them, Surgeary said.

"We are highly educated professionals who work extremely hard," she said. "We educate teenage girls whose lives have been completely disrupted. We have chosen to take on a task most teachers will not do. We teach students that others deem unteachable. Our role as educators, role models, and tutors is rewarding, but extremely challenging."

Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

SIGN NOW!



State of the Union reflects PEF's Stronger Roots, Bolder Future'

By KATE STICKLES

President Wayne Spence delivered his 11th State of the Union address at the 47th annual PEF Convention October 20 in Lake Placid, sharing the union's victories over the last year and looking to continued success in the future.

"This year's Convention theme, 'Stronger Roots, Bolder Future,' reminds us that we are not here by accident, we are a product of decades of collective action, hard-fought battles, and unbreakable solidarity," President Spence told the nearly 700 delegates. "Our roots are strong. They were planted by the trailblazers who came before us – those who demanded fair pay, fought for safety standards, and believed that dignity at work was a right, not a reward.

"Those roots anchor us, give us strength when political winds shift, steady us when others try to divide us, and remind us that we are one union, one voice, moving forward together," he said. "But roots don't just keep us grounded – they nourish growth. They allow us to envision, reach, and rise toward a bolder future – one where workers are protected and empowered, where our members are not just heard but heeded."

Among the achievements this past year, PEF led the fight to save SUNY Downstate, resulting in \$1.1 billion in funding to preserve Downstate as a full-service public hospital.

"We didn't just save jobs – we saved healthcare in Central Brooklyn," President Spence said. "We did something that folks didn't think we would be able to do. What we now have is a template on how to work with the community to come together, not just as a union, but as a collective force to tackle issues. Other unions are looking at what we did in Brooklyn as a template for what can be done across the country."

In 2025, PEF's advocacy included fights for salary upgrades for underpaid titles; staffing relief at critical state agencies; and Civil Service modernization footed in fairness. Over the last year, PEF helped win \$50 million for body scanners at DOCCS and other facilities and \$25 million to expand mental health services through Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams and case management.

Each department at PEF played pivotal roles in protecting, empowering, and lifting up members across the state. PEF Legal secured \$128,000 in back pay for members thanks in part to the Expedited Suspension Review process secured in the last contract. The Health and Safety, Organizing, and Communications departments banded together to develop the Stop Workplace Violence campaign, which led to potentially life-saving changes at OMH.



"We now hear about violent incidents in the workplace immediately, allowing us to quickly support members," President Spence said. "If you remember, it was last year at Convention that member Peter Shiffman was assaulted by a patient at South Beach Psychiatric Center and I showed you a photo of his horrible injuries. He is still recovering and now sharing his story. WCBS-TV in New York talked to him, Carl Ankrah, and me for a piece that really highlights our efforts to curb workplace violence in state agencies. We don't have to wait for somebody to be attacked to change those situations. We need to highlight these things."

President Spence reported that PEF has already begun asking the state to come to the table and start work on a successor collective bargaining agreement. "The Contract Team is ready to work," he said. "They have been training and putting in the work and doing their homework."

RELATED: [Convention workshop seeks member input on contract](#)

PEF continues to grow, with 1,600 new dues-paying members added in calendar year 2024.

"That's not just a number," President Spence said, "that is power at the bargaining table, in the Legislature, and at the workplace. We will never allow our members to become collateral damage in a broken system. We will fight. When things go wrong, we will demand safety, respect, and action, not apologies."

The Trump Administration has begun implementing aspects of Project 2025, President Spence said, including massive cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, which ripple across state agency budgets where members work.

"We cannot allow national politics to destroy local services," he said. "I believe our future is a bold future. Let us recommit. Let us refocus. Let us rise – together. Because we are stronger than the crisis and bolder than the opposition. We set the bar. We raise the standard. We lead the way."

RELATED: [Gov. Hochul](#), [Comptroller DiNapoli](#), [labor leaders address delegates](#)





Department of Transportation

PEF gets a win against DOT surveillance of personal property

By KATE STICKLES

PEF filed an improper practice charge on behalf of a member against the Department of Transportation (DOT) after the agency installed a surveillance camera in front of her private property where her family has a maple processing setup and farmstand.

The member worked some afternoons remotely from the property. DOT installed the camera to investigate whether she was running her business on work time. The camera was recording the comings and goings of her children and spouse, who also spent time at the property.

When PEF became aware of this practice, Field Representative Shaun Francis filed an improper practice charge against DOT for installing the camera without first notifying and negotiating over its installation with PEF. The union asserted that this intrusion violated

the privacy of her and her family. An Administrative Law Judge agreed and found that the state violated New York's Taylor Law when DOT unilaterally installed the camera.

"Protecting our members on the job is one of PEF's top priorities," said Statewide Director of Field Services Katie Vorwald. "The installation of this camera invaded the privacy of the member's spouse and children, as well as anyone who visited the property. Members have rights when telecommuting and we will continue to work to ensure they are respected."

Enrollment for 2026 Flexible Spending Accounts is open through December 8

By **NAJEE WALKER**

For PEF members who wish to enroll in a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) with the New York State's program administrator, Total Administrative Services Corporation (TASC), open enrollment is underway until December 8, 2025. Enrollment lasts for one year, and members need to enroll annually if they would like to continue using FSA programs.

FSA benefits help members save money by allowing payment for certain health-related expenses with pre-tax dollars. The Health Care Spending Account (HCSA), Dependent Care Advantage Account (DCAA), and Adoption Advantage Account are the most popular FSA programs.

Members must enroll using [TASC's online platform](#). Answers to eligibility questions about any of the programs can be found on [OER's website](#).

Adoption Advantage accounts allow a member to pay expenses related to the adoption of a child with pre-tax dollars up to \$17,670.

An HSCA sets aside money starting as low as \$100 up to the maximum of \$3,400 for 2026 to pay for health care expenses that are not reimbursed by health insurance or other plans. Medical, hospital, dental, vision, hearing, prescription drug and certain over-the-counter drug expenses for members, spouses and eligible dependents can be reimbursed by an HCSA.

When using a DCAA, members may set aside pre-tax dollars — up to a maximum of either \$7,500 or \$3,750 based on tax filing status — to pay for eligible childcare for children under the age of 13, elder care or disabled dependent care expenses.

Members may enroll in a DCAA without choosing to set aside any of their own money from each paycheck, and they will still receive a minimum employer contribution from the State. The State contribution amount has increased twice in recent years due to the advocacy of PEF representatives on the Article 10 Work-Life Services Advisory Board. If you have eligible dependent care expenses, don't leave this employer contribution on the table!



Enrollment for 2026 Flexible Spending Accounts is open through December 8

2026 PLAN YEAR EMPLOYER DCAA CONTRIBUTION RATES
If Your Salary is... The Employer Contribution is...

Under \$30,000	\$1,100
\$30,001 – \$40,000	\$1,000
\$40,001 – \$50,000	\$900
\$50,001 – \$60,000	\$800
\$60,001 – \$70,000	\$700
Over \$70,000	\$600

PEF's Contract Administration department produced a memo with all this information and more if members have any questions.



Productivity Enhancement Program open enrollment November 1 through December 8

The Productivity Enhancement Program (PEP) allows eligible employees to exchange previously accrued annual leave and/or personal leave in return for a biweekly credit to reduce their share of New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP) premiums.

The 2023-2026 PEF/State Agreement improved the benefit and it now allows Institution Teachers to exchange floating days and compensatory days (if applicable).

The 2026 PEP credit will begin with the first 2026 health insurance premium deduction. The amount that will be credited toward

the biweekly employee share of the premium is reflected in the following charts and based on the employee's salary grade and the number of days forfeited. The credit for part-time employees will be prorated based on their payroll percentage.

In no case will the credit exceed the biweekly NYSHIP premium.

Salary Grade 17 and Below:

Non-Teachers

Forfeited Days	Annual NYSHIP Credit	Biweekly Credit
4	\$800	\$30.77
8	\$1,600	\$61.54

Institution Teachers

Forfeited Days	Annual NYSHIP Credit	Biweekly Credit
1	\$200	\$7.69
2	\$400	\$15.38
3	\$600	\$23.08
4	\$800	\$30.77
5	\$1,000	\$38.46
6	\$1,200	\$46.15
7	\$1,400	\$53.85
8	\$1,600	\$61.54

Salary Grade 18 through 24 :

Non-Teachers

Forfeited Days	Annual NYSHIP Credit	Biweekly Credit
2.5	\$750	\$28.85
58	\$1,500	\$57.69

Institution Teachers

Forfeited Days	Annual NYSHIP Credit	Biweekly Credit
1	\$300	\$11.54
2	\$600	\$23.08
3	\$900	\$34.62
4	\$1,200	\$46.15
5	\$1,500	\$57.69

Agency attendance and leave offices must first review eligibility prior to forwarding to the agency Health Benefit Administrator (HBA). Agencies are responsible for distribution and retention of enrollment forms, coordination between the personnel office and the HBA, and certification of accrual adjustments.



Women's Trade Union League participating in 1908 Labor Day Parade in NYC, courtesy of Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Women's Trade Union League rises in November 1903

By **NAJEE WALKER**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, working conditions for most in the United States were fraught with danger and low wages. For women workers, that was especially true. It was the creation of “settlement houses” that helped working women organize on the job.

Settlement houses brought together middle- and upper-class reformers with working-class women. Often, working-class women who lived in settlement houses would receive assistance from their wealthier benefactors. The “settlement movement” was popular in the U.S. from 1890 -1910 due to the immigration of more than 12 million Europeans.

Two social reformers who worked in settlement houses, Mary Morton Kehew and Jane Addams, led the way in the settlement movement, and later in the labor movement. With the help of the American Federation of Labor, Kehew and Addams organized the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and became the first president and vice president of the organization in 1903.

By 1904, the organization had branches in Chicago, New York City, and Boston. WTUL worked to provide working women with educational opportunities, while also supporting women workers to improve working conditions.

Beginning in 1909, league members marched alongside other striking workers during the garment industry strikes. For the two years that the strike lasted, the league worked to set up strike funds and organized boycotts of clothing manufacturers who did not work with the strikers.

The Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1911 killed 146 workers, mostly women and girls as young as 14. WTUL conducted an investigation of factory conditions following the fire and helped establish new labor regulations that would eventually lead to the creation of the American Society of Safety Professionals.

By the 1920s, WTUL's actions under the presidency of Margaret Dreier Robins helped to establish a minimum wage, eight-hour workdays, and the abolition of child labor. However, during the Great Depression, the league was hard hit financially, and its membership dwindled. The WTUL dissolved by the 1950s, but its legacy of nearly half a century of activism paved the way for the organized labor movement that is thriving in states like New York today.



Executive Board vacancy filled, 4 contested seats go to balloting in October Special Election

One vacant seat on the PEF Executive Board has been filled, and four are heading to balloting after the October 2025 Special Election cycle.

Francis (Nicke) McAndrew fills **Seat 460**, representing certain members at the Department of State.

Seat 30, representing certain members at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision; **Seat 180**, representing certain members at the Department of Health; **Seat 220**, representing certain members at the Workers' Compensation Board; and **Seat 325**, representing certain members at the Office of Mental Health, head to balloting.

For those in contested elections, ballots were mailed from the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and are returnable to the address on the return envelope no later than 5 p.m. December 11, 2025. Returned in this case means in hand, not date mailed or postmarked. Ballots will be counted December 12, 2025, by AAA in New York City.

Elections for **Seat 15** (Civil Service), **Seat 127** (Homeland Security) and **Seat 161** (Executive) will be run in January 2026, as well as any that become vacant in the interim.

Visit www.pef.org/elections or contact the PEF Divisions Department at 518-785-1900 ext. 337 for information and petitions.



Stronger Roots, **Bolder Future.**

2025 PEF Convention

Nearly 700 delegates conduct business of the union at 47th annual PEF Convention

By KATE STICKLES

The 47th annual PEF Convention kicked off October 20 on the 1932 ice rink at the Olympic Center in Lake Placid, bringing together nearly 700 delegates from various agencies all across the state to consider a constitutional amendment, legislative agendas, and 38 different resolutions.

"It's my honor and privilege to stand before you, the heart, the voice, and the driving force of our union," said Convention Chair and Vice President Darlene Williams. "This year's theme is Stronger Roots, Bolder Future – where we are going depends on where we come from. PEF was founded in 1979 and built by people who refused to settle for less, believed the voices of the public employee mattered, and paved the way with passion, courage and persistence.

"I hope the delegates in this room have that passion, have that courage, and have the persistence to stand up for what is right," she said. "They faced tough fights, long nights, and sometimes impossible odds and yet they stood their ground and because of that, we stand here today."

VP Williams said in a divided world, it is more important than ever to stand together.

"When it comes to standing up for safe workplaces and fair wages, we don't wear red or blue, we wear PEF," she said. "Let's celebrate how far we've come and recommit ourselves to shaping the path ahead. This is our moment."

A stable fiscal position

PEF is in "the best financial position in the history of the union," reported Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue to the delegates. "I am proud of all the hard work that we have put in to make this union larger, stronger, as well as more relevant. We have led by example and other unions look to us. I can report to you PEF is in very good financial shape, and I intend to keep it there."

PEF received an unmodified opinion in its audit by the Bonadio Group, the best opinion that can be given. (The full audit was published in the [September 2025 Communicator](#), page 36.)



Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue delivers his annual report on Oct. 21, 2025.

"Current assets of the union stand at over \$32.2 million, an increase in almost \$3.7 million from the prior year," Donahue said. "This increase is due to the change in net assets from operations of \$1.31 million as well as investment gains of \$659,000."

Current liabilities increased approximately \$750,000, mainly due to the timing of invoices after year-end. Total liabilities increased by approximately \$2.15 million due to significant increases in post-retirement liability, higher than anticipated medical claims in 2024, and an increase in the active number of participants in PEF's medical plan.

Membership is up, Donahue reported, with dues revenue exceeding \$44 million, coming in at approximately \$44.4 million for fiscal year 2024-25, an increase of approximately \$3.6 million.

"This significant increase is due to membership going from 51,673 at the end of 2024 to 54,277 at the end of 2025, an increase of 2,604 members throughout the year as well as the 3% contract raise in April 2024," the Secretary-Treasurer said. "Total revenue grew by approximately \$4.08 million to \$47.7 million while total expenditures increased by approximately \$3.68 million to \$45.9 million, a change in net assets from operations of a positive \$1.31 million.

"Of course, our costs are increasing, but so are our efforts to recruit and retain members," he said. "Due to these uncertain times at the federal level, we need to be prepared for anything that negatively

impacts our membership. Just like when the Janus decision was handed down, we need to plan for the worst yet hope for the best.”

PEF’s three trustees, Muriel Hardy-Lee, Kelly Nadeau, and Radhakrishna Mohan, also presented their report to delegates, noting that PEF is “financially stable and secure” and there were no findings of fraud, waste, or abuse in audits of officers, Regions, or Divisions.

Legislative agendas



PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio chairs debate over the State and Federal Legislative Agendas on Oct. 21, 2025.

PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio presented the state and federal legislative agendas and chaired the debate and adoption of both.

“Right now, federal funding is under siege, and the consequences are already hitting home for the New York State workforce,” DiAntonio said. “We depend on those federal dollars. Over one-third of our state’s budget, \$93 billion, is tied to federal sources. When Washington cuts, New York feels it deeply. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment. Every day, every bill passed or blocked, every budget shift – it affects our ability to serve, to live in this state, to support our families.”

The approved Federal and State Legislative Agendas will be added to the [PEF website](#) as soon as the amendments approved by Convention delegates are incorporated.

Convention charity fundraiser breaks record



Host Region Coordinator Barbara Stransky, left, poses for a photo with Region 7 delegates and representatives from the Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund.

Every year, the host Region selects a local charity and organizes a fundraiser. This year, delegates shattered expectations and donated \$12,117.69 to Region 7’s chosen charity, [the Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund](#).

“I am beyond speechless,” said Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky. “This is a record for a PEF Convention.”

Every penny donated to the Gouverneur Breast and Ovarian Cancer Fund goes to help someone who is facing the long road from diagnosis to recovery in St. Lawrence, Jefferson, Lewis, and Franklin counties. All donations provide direct financial support to someone who needs help during this challenging time.

“This is by far the largest the Convention has ever raised,” said President Spence. “Thank you for blowing it out of the water in terms of what was raised.”

Constitutional amendment and resolutions

Delegates voted to amend the PEF Constitution to deem the New York State Office of Information Technology Services as a separate Department for the purpose of representation under Article VII, which governs the Executive Board. The change “calls out the agency and helps create an identity,” proponents said.

Of the 38 resolutions presented to Convention delegates, 12 made it to the floor for debate and consideration by the body. Prior to the start of plenary sessions, delegates met to discuss the resolutions, recommend action, and prioritize the order in which they were considered.

Adopted as printed or as amended included:

Resolution 5: On establishing a comprehensive council leader training and certification program;

Resolution 7: On fighting back against federal budget cuts;

Resolution 8: On fixing Tier 6 and improving retirement equity;

Resolution 9: On addressing workplace violence;

Resolution 13: On encouraging and promoting management participation in labor/management;

Resolution 20: Dealing with addressing extra vacation pay disparity;

Resolution 26: On reimagining the PS&T evaluation and examination system for talent acquisition and retention;

Resolution 27: On amending the Leave Donation Program/Exchange Program.

Resolution 33, on accurate and explicit financial reporting, was tabled, as this information is already provided to the Executive Board quarterly. **Resolution 15,** which called for creation of a statewide director of health care services on the PEF staff, was heavily debated and delegates voted to recommend the President form a committee to discuss the proposal. **Resolution 1,** which dealt with fighting racism at the Department of Labor, was referred to the agency’s labor/management committee. **Resolution 31,** asking for full mileage reimbursement for Convention delegates who don’t carpool, failed.



Governor Hochul thanks PEF members

By NAJEE WALKER

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul took the stage on Day One of the PEF Convention on Oct. 20, 2025, with one simple message: Thank you.

"The reason why your union and the work you do is so personal and important to me, is because of my record as a public servant," Governor Hochul told the nearly 700 delegates in Lake Placid. "I was elected to serve 31 years ago, and I know it is because of people like you — the hardworking, unsung heroes, that so many New Yorkers get to thrive."

The governor understands the frustrations of Tier 6, she said, because she knows the struggles all New Yorkers face as things get more expensive across the state and the country.

"Our costs continue to rise as inflation wreaks havoc on our lives. That is why my administration is countering the sweeping DOGE (Department of Governmental Efficiency) cuts made earlier this year," she said. "We're making it easier for federal workers who have lost their jobs to enter into state service instead."

Governor Hochul also celebrated a new unemployment benefit, one championed by PEF as well, which increases the historically low benefit from \$540 per week to \$869 per week.

"As more workers are laid off or on strike due to issues coming down from the federal government, these increases will keep those New Yorkers afloat as they try to find their way again," said Hochul.

Several pieces of legislation that made their way to Governor Hochul's desk were brought to the finish line by PEF. In her address, Hochul highlighted the more than \$1 billion in funding for SUNY Downstate, the \$1 billion in funding for mental health and addiction services, and the LOADinG Act legislation—which compels agencies that use Artificial Intelligence to disclose when it is being used, and not displace workers.

"All of this legislation was made possible thanks to PEF and thanks to your caring and compassionate workforce," said Hochul. "I know that you are committing yourselves every day to being a part of making New York just a little bit better. I believe in that mission, and I know you believe in that mission, too."



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Today**

Labor leaders emphasize unity and collective action

By **KATE STICKLES** and **NAJEE WALKER**

During his keynote address at PEF Convention on Oct. 20, 2025, Transit Workers Union (TWU) International President John Samuelson delivered a strong reminder that unions must stick to their values and take the fight to management.

"We have demonstrated that growth is possible," he said. "Workers have a favorable opinion of unions when they fight. TWU's philosophy is sticking to our core values, taking the fight to the bosses and winning solid contracts. There is great synergy there. We win solid contracts every time we win a fight, workers on the outside see the victories, and they want to join the TWU."

"Our footprint gets bigger, we grow our political strength, and we are able to win more victories," he said. "The more we win, the more (workers) want to join. It all starts with having the audacity to take on the employers in contract fights."

In 2026, several large union contracts will expire, including PEF collective bargaining agreements with New York State. Samuelson said unions shouldn't trust any particular political party and need to remain a unified labor movement.

"At the end of the day, I would say there is no governor, no mayor, that can compel us to sign a contract we don't want to sign," he said. "We're here because we want to take care of our families. Let's be in lockstep and as long as we're together, we're not going to be beaten by Gov. Hochul, Democrats, or Republicans."

Mario Cilento



NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento addresses the PEF Convention on Oct. 21, 2025.

On day two, delegates were joined by New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento, a long-time unionist who began his career with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) in 1990.

He thanked PEF members for continuing to give their time and hard work to the union, but also to the labor movement. He also thanked

President Wayne Spence for continuing his work as a Vice President of the NYS AFL-CIO.

"Wayne serves on the executive board as a vice president. In that capacity, he has two responsibilities," Cilento said. "First is to represent the interests of this union and every single one of your members. From the day that he came onto our executive board, he would speak to the issues important to PEF. To this day, he has the full, unmitigated support and respect of every single union leader around that table. And considering we have some of the most powerful labor unions sitting around that table, that means something— when Wayne speaks, everyone listens."

In his VP role in the federation, President Spence helps chart the legislative and political priorities for 2.5 million NYS AFL-CIO members.

"You have some incredible accomplishments this year, including \$1 billion in funding for SUNY Downstate, and your union was able to push legislation twice in four years to Fix Tier 6, and those are great accomplishments," said Cilento. "But every year I have to go and see the governor to talk about the legislative agenda. And while fixing Tier 6 are priorities for PEF and our public-sector unions, I can also tell the governor that those are the priorities of our building trades and private-sector unions as well."

Cilento also addressed politics, reminding delegates that union members vote for both Democrats and Republicans, but it is up to union leaders to educate members on the best candidates at every level for working class people. He also reminded delegates that there are attacks on the rights of working people to organize and engage in collective bargaining across the country.

"Imagine if you went back into the office on Monday morning and found that your manager or supervisor was going to rip up your CBA? Forget about wages, benefits and conditions of employment. And they're going to cut 50% of the workforce right now," said Cilento. "What would your reaction be?"

Cilento said it is up to leadership to be factual with their memberships. Leaders will need to educate members and hope they make the right choice at the voting booth in order to keep jobs from being lost and unions from being dissolved, regardless of what party is in power.

"No matter who you are or where you're from, we all share the same needs, the same concerns and the same wants. We share the same values and the same principles and the same ideas," Cilento said. "We all want to be able to go to work and support ourselves and support our families, we all want to be a part of the economic engine that runs this country and we all want to be productive members of this society."

Randi Weingarten



AFT President Randi Weingarten addresses the PEF Convention via Zoom, joined by U.S. Rep. Timothy Kennedy (D-26), on Oct. 21, 2025.

AFT President Randi Weingarten also appeared before the delegates via Zoom on day two of Convention. Weingarten was in Washington visiting legislators as the government shutdown continued and was joined briefly by Congressman Timothy Kennedy, who represents New York's 26th District, encompassing the city of Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

"I wanted to jump on and say thank you so much for your leadership in the workforce," said Representative Kennedy. "PEF, you are second to none. We are fighting to protect healthcare and to lower costs for working families, and I cannot thank you enough for all that you do for the great people of New York and this nation."

Weingarten opened her remarks by recognizing the ongoing fight to fix Tier 6 in New York State.

"Your issues are similar to many pension funds across the nation," said Weingarten. "We need to make sure that the kitchen table issues — decent healthcare, good wages — basically, having the things you need to make sure you can do your job, we need to make sure that there is more fairness on these issues."

Weingarten said that these issues should be bipartisan. As rising costs for everything from food to health insurance threaten working families, due in part to the government shutdown and federal cuts earlier this year, Weingarten believes that unions will need to fight at every level to make sure government works for them.

"You have to remember that the \$1 billion you got to save SUNY Downstate did not come magically," said Weingarten. "It was the strength and determination of PEF. All of the members of PEF. We have the power and strength to keep going together to deliver those outcomes."

Delegates were asked to keep an open mind about becoming politically involved wherever they can. Weingarten thanked members who showed up to No Kings rallies across the state in June and again on Oct. 18 and said that when PEF members show up to represent working people, they give working people a voice in government.

"Just as you, as a union, deliver the voice you need at work; you also need a voice in government," she said. "We use that voice to get better wages, healthcare, housing and so much more. Politicians on both sides are running campaigns on affordability. Our voice is so important right now."

April Verrett



SEIU President April Verrett told delegates it's important "to sing with one voice and sing the same song," on Oct. 20, 2025.

SEIU President April Verrett, who counts many PEF members among her two million members, built upon the Convention theme "Stronger Roots, Bolder Future" in her address to the delegates.

"We are gathered at a time when your work and courage has never been more needed," said Verrett. "It is no coincidence that this year's convention theme is 'Stronger Roots, Bolder Future,' because that is what President Wayne Spence has built. That is what all of you are building together, and that is what our movement is being called to live up to right now."

Verrett's positive message of solidarity came with a dose of reality: that unions are under assault, that the news can be exhausting, but in the end, she believes that unions will stand strong.

"We are in a time of crisis," she said. "Every day we wake up to another assault on our rights. But in moments like these, we must remember that chaos is the point. They want to wear us down and thin us out, but we do not come from weakness. This movement for building worker power was built on strength. Our roots are deep and held steady through every storm."

Verrett reminded delegates that the labor movement has fought to organize in fields and factories for eight-hour workdays, and more recently, showed up for the people of the nation as well as for their union members at the height of a global pandemic. That work, said Verrett, is continuing.

"When systems collapse, it is working people who show up to build something better," said Verrett. "I see the fire in the room. Healthcare workers are pushing back against being erased by algorithms, you are standing firm against dangerous work assignments that jeopardize your safety, and you're organizing for equity, fairness and a voice. Not just at the table, you are redesigning the system itself."

Verrett called on delegates to keep their roots and history in mind when considering where to go next. The future, she said, may look uncertain, but as long as the labor movement remains united, she believes unions will win.

"The enemies of the labor movement are coordinated and moving as one. They are well-funded and playing for keeps," Verrett said. "We cannot afford division. We cannot waste time tearing each other down. We are building a movement choir, so we have to sing with one voice and sing the same song."



Delegates discuss contract ideas

By KATE STICKLES

Between plenary sessions on Monday and Tuesday, Convention delegates had a chance to share some topics they would like to see addressed during the next round of contract negotiations. Some of the top suggestions were telecommuting, short staffing, and improvements to the dental plan provider network, in addition to across-the-board raises and continuation of the Higher Education Differential.

"We have a really amazing contract team," said Contract Administration Director Debra Greenberg. "We have a great chief negotiator and a strong administration at PEF, but we really need membership's involvement. We could go in there with the most persuasive arguments, but we need people being vocal, talking to fellow members, participating in solidarity events, writing letters. Showing unity is what is going to really help with the contract."

On the issue of telecommuting, members noted different standards at different agencies and across different units. Some suggested telecommuting accommodations for weather and adverse situations where it's dangerous to travel to worksites.

Capping caseloads, offering more varied shifts and staggered worktimes, and fairly enforcing lunch and breaks at institutions and hospitals, where members often work through both, also came up. In addition, many members expressed frustration with the Anthem dental plan and want to see improvements to the provider network.

PEF has submitted a request to bargain to the New York State Office of Employee Relations, but has not yet heard back about specific dates. The current Collective Bargaining Agreement for the PS&T unit runs through April 1, 2026. In the meantime, the Contract Team is still reviewing suggestions from members, so please email 2026ContractSuggestions@pef.org.



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Comptroller talks shutdown, budgets, and pension

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Traditionally at PEF Conventions, New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli could be found on Sunday at the President's Reception meeting and greeting delegates before they head to the Convention floor on Monday morning. This year, due to unprecedented cuts to the federal budget and the government shutdown, PEF President Wayne Spence invited DiNapoli to a panel discussion on the Convention stage on Oct. 20, alongside PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio.

Understanding the impact

DiNapoli said that since June 2025, New York has seen a direct impact to its budget as a result of federal cuts and the passage of the U.S. budget. About a third (\$93 billion) of the state budget is funded by federal dollars.

"Right now, we're in pretty good shape, but there were an additional round of healthcare cuts and Medicaid cuts. (The shortfall is) about \$750 million in this year's budget," DiNapoli told delegates. "When you consider the size of the budget and that our revenue is higher than projected, we could absorb whatever the impact was going to be. The problem is next year, and the year after that, and the year after that."

In terms of the state workforce, DiNapoli said that about 9,000 state employees are tied directly to federal funds. Eighty percent of employees at the New York State Department of Labor are federally funded. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the State Education Department are about 40 percent funded by the federal government, as are about 25 percent of employees who work in healthcare settings.

DiNapoli also spoke about the human impact of healthcare cuts.

"The way these cuts are targeted is largely at healthcare and safety-net programs," he said. "What is it going to mean if some of our neighbors, friends and family members who are now getting health insurance from the essential plans or the Affordable Care Act—if they're going to lose that coverage—what will that mean for them?"

Other programs around climate change, energy transition, and food assistance are also on the chopping block. PEF members help administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which if eliminated, could lead to as many as 300,000 New Yorkers losing the benefit that helps them feed their families.

Tier 6 Reform

President Spence asked about additional Tier 6 reform. DiNapoli said his main goal is to make sure the pension plan is always as close to fully funded as possible. He also said that while he is not in control of changes made to Tier 6, he recognizes that every reform comes at a cost.

"Changes to Tier 6, COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) enhancements, those are all done by the Legislature and the Governor. We have had some enhancements to Tier 6, thanks to your advocacy, and I know there is pressure to do more," said DiNapoli. "Well over half of our employees are Tier 5 and Tier 6 now. There is going to be a cost impact, and we do try to make money through our investments."

Pension investments are subject to fluctuations in the stock market. Tariffs that were enacted by the Trump Administration caused some markets to swing downward in March, then recover in April.

"We still landed at the end of our fiscal year on March 31 at 5.84% positive return," said DiNapoli. "So, we are meeting our targets. If benefit enhancement is going to affect the cost, I have to make sure that we are charging the employers a rate to keep us as close to 100% funded as possible. My obligation is to you as members to raise the rates if I have to."

DiNapoli believes that additional pension reform is possible, especially because of the recruitment and retention issues among state agencies. So far, he said he's heard no objections from employers because they see the value in a better pension system.

"I think the more that labor can work together, I think we will see more of the changes that have happened already—like the change in terms of the salary average from five to three years, the change in vesting and the change in overtime calculation—more changes like that will happen because labor spoke with one voice," said DiNapoli.

Employer audits by the Comptroller

One closing question came from Vice President DiAntonio.

"The Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) audits state agencies," said DiAntonio. "And for those of us who sit at our Labor Management tables, we often turn to these reports to address overtime and staffing with the employer. Can you tell the delegates about those audits and where they can find them?"

DiNapoli said all audits are on the comptroller's website. Many of them are conducted by PEF members. He said audits can be a good way to save New York money or figure out if more money should be spent, especially when it comes to staffing.

"We often get good suggestions from rank-and-file state employees, including PEF members, on where to audit," said DiNapoli. "I think it is great when you all get involved and find ways for us to save money, especially given all the things we've talked about surrounding the federal cuts to services."

Israeli bonds tied to pensions

President Spence knows that PEF members have strong opinions on worldly affairs. There were some questions from Convention delegates regarding how their pensions invest in Israeli bonds, given the violence in the Middle East.

In response, DiNapoli said in his opinion as a fiduciary pulling that money would not be in anyone's best interest.

"We take the overall position that we are an investor, not a divestor," said DiNapoli. "If we put all our money in a savings account, nobody would argue with us. But we wouldn't be making enough money to pay for the pensions, which is really our obligation."

DiNapoli said the State's fixed income portfolio has been investing in Israeli bonds since before he became Comptroller in 2007. The return on the investment has been safe and reliable, said DiNapoli, about 5%. He also said that he understands that there are a lot of people hurting because of the situation in Gaza.

"I try to explain to people that we're invested in the bonds. We're not supporting a particular government in Israel," said DiNapoli. "I have my own opinions as well, but I can't let my opinions, or other people's personal opinions or political agendas, drive the pension. It is not fair to all of you."

At the end of the roundtable, DiNapoli thanked PEF members for their hard work and dedication.

"Thank you for your support and for supporting each other. Your unity is needed now more than ever," he said.



PEF delegates approve state and federal legislative agendas

By **NAJEE WALKER**

One of the most important duties carried out annually at PEF Convention is the debate and approval of the union's State and Federal Legislative Agendas. Developed in coordination with PEF's Regional and Statewide Political Action Committees, the agendas delineate the issues PEF will advocate for and against in the coming year, both in Albany and in Washington.

PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio chaired the debate on Oct. 21 in Lake Placid.

"As you have heard many times from other speakers before me, but it is worth repeating—because it is important—federal funding is under siege," she said. "And the consequences for that are already hitting home for New York State's workforce."

One-third of the State's budget — which is about \$93 billion — is tied to federal funding. In addition to cuts by the Trump Administration earlier in the year, which threaten many of New York's public services and jobs, the ongoing federal government shutdown has frozen much of the funding to the state and the services they fund.

At last year's PEF Convention, the union held honest discussions about the theoretical issues faced if the Project 2025 playbook were to be implemented. Now, said Vice President DiAntonio, those challenges are being implemented in real time.

"Across federal agencies, more than 300,000 workers have already lost their jobs," she said. "And 1 in 14 federal employees lost their collective bargaining rights. The goal is very clear: weaken unions, shrink public service, to silence voices of working people."

DiAntonio reminded delegates that this strategy has been deployed before against public service workers. The tactic, she said, is to devalue the work done by public servants only to then lean on nepotism, political appointees, and privatization.

"We have heard people refer to the federal workforce as bloat, fraud, waste and abuse," she said. "People say that about us too. That we're a burden on taxpayers. Think about how hard you work just to be characterized that way."

DiAntonio urged delegates that despite the political machine moving against unions, the reason for unions to fight is not about politics, but principles: good contracts, collective bargaining, due process, healthcare, wages, security, and dignity in the workplace.

"Our strength lies in our union; in our values; in our strategy," she said. "When we are united, we are powerful. When we are divided, we are paralyzed."

With unity of purpose and by forming coalitions with other unions, PEF has delivered legislation that reforms Tier 6 of the State pension plan, regulates AI transparency, and recognizes mental healthcare coverage under workers' compensation. Additionally, PEF played a key part on the HALT (Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement) Committee, which recommended changes to the law that governs the use of solitary confinement in correctional facilities.

"A lot of people tell me, 'I'm not political.' If you are a government employee, you are political," said DiAntonio, echoing a sentiment she shared with delegates at the 2018 Convention in Lake Placid. "Because we need to maintain and grow our funding so that we can keep delivering services and keep our jobs. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment."

DiAntonio urged delegates to think of political action as part of their job. Writing letters, attending rallies, and going to meetings or visiting legislators are part of what it means to be a unionist and a public servant.

"I encourage you all to join your region's Political Action Committee. We need activists in every legislative district—regardless of your party affiliation—because it gives members a collective voice in decisions that affect their jobs, benefits and working conditions," she said. (Interested members need only contact their [Regional Coordinator](#) to get started.)

Following the vice president's speech, the delegates voted to add language to both the state and federal legislative agendas to include PEF's advocacy for "making childcare for all more affordable, accessible and higher quality through increased funding, workforce development and expanded subsidies."

The delegates also added language to the state agenda that included support for legislation that pays full salary and medical payments for employment-related heart disease injuries for parole offices, senior parole officers, parole revocation specialists, preliminary hearing officers and administrative law judges.

Both the amended federal and state legislative agendas for 2026 were approved by the delegates. (They will be posted on the PEF [website](#) when all the final edits are made.)

COPE contributions are up

Contributions to the Committee on Political Education (COPE), a crucial component of PEF's advocacy on the federal level, were up again this year.

"Why do we care about federal dollars?" said COPE Coordinator Don Morgenstern. "We care because more than one-third of the state's \$254 billion budget comes from federal funds. Medicaid funds services at OMH, OPWDD, DOH, OASAS, SUNY hospitals, Roswell Park. DOL is over 90% federally funded. We can't use dues money to lobby federal politicians – this is why we have COPE."

Morgenstern reported COPE contributions are up 10% for the third year in a row, and the number of contributors is up 7%. PEF Division 407, Metro NY DDSO, continues to be the division with the highest number of members contributing at 60%.

Members can fill out and submit an electronic COPE application on the [website](#) or the [PEF app](#).



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Pictured from left to right in the group shot, PEF Assistant Director of Health & Safety Josh Kemp, Health & Safety Assistant Niki Grabo, Article 18 co-chair Leisa Abraham, Health & Safety Director Geraldine Stella, Article 18 co-chair Gabriela Franklyn, and Health & Safety Specialist Jazmine Nova Morales.

Communication and facts are key to Health & Safety advocacy

The annual Health & Safety (H&S) Breakfast during Convention on Oct. 21 started with a 12-person game of “Telephone,” driving home the point that oftentimes news that travels from person to person loses a lot along the way, leaving leaders with incomplete or incorrect information to work with at the health and safety table.

“Isn’t this what is happening all the time?” asked Article 18 co-chair Leisa Abraham. “We’re not going back to the source, we’re hearing it from the last person, and we act on that final message. We really want to talk about the importance of communication.”

In the vendor area at Convention, PEF Health and Safety staff asked delegates to rate communication, management commitment, union involvement, hazard reporting and fixing, training and knowledge, and H&S committees at their worksites as either positive or needs improvement.

“Communication was one of the biggest things we need to do better,” Abraham said.

Fellow co-chair Gabriela Franklyn said follow-up is crucial.

“A lot of times our members will bring us the last message so we must take our time to investigate and do our due diligence to bring the facts to management so we can address issues in a timely manner,” she said.

Without correct information, little can be done to effect change.

“It’s really important to know what’s happening on the ground,” Abraham said.

PEF launched a “Stop Workplace Violence” campaign this year, where staff and leaders do tabling events at worksites and share information with members on how to protect themselves and what paperwork to obtain and fill out.

“If it’s not written down, what does management do? Nothing,” said Abraham.

In the coming year, the H&S department and union leaders will continue tabling to educate members about workplace violence, and remains committed to growing health and safety committees across the state.

“We have to teach people to be advocates in the moment,” Franklyn said.



PEF nurses celebrate Nurse Coordinator and organize at Convention

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The annual Nurses' Luncheon at the PEF convention delivers important information to delegates who work as nurses and healthcare workers across the state. It is an opportunity for nurses across agencies to share their issues and communicate with PEF leaders and staff where they need the most assistance.

At a time when nurses have seen record high numbers of assaults and where unsafe work conditions are on the rise, Amy Lee Pacholk, a Registered Nurse in the Teaching and Research Civil Service title who works at University Hospital at SUNY Stony Brook and is co-chair of the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee, reminded the nurses in attendance that there are a few initiatives that need their support.

"We need to have somebody sitting at the table. I know you have all heard the statement that if you are not sitting at the table, then you do not get to make the decisions," said Pacholk. "What we have found over and over again is that healthcare, at large, is not being advocated for in PEF the way that we need it to be advocated for."

More than 20 percent of PEF members are nurses or hold a healthcare title of some kind. They work at SUNY facilities, OTDA, OPWDD, DOCCS, DOH and multiple other agencies.

"The truth is, if you work for a healthcare agency, you know that our needs are not met by the contract alone," said Pacholk. "We generally can't use our cancer screening time as nurses if we work the evening or night shift as doctors' offices and imaging centers are not open at that time. Civil Service law states that one can only use that benefit while working, so the Civil Service law needs to change to accommodate our members who work evening and night shift members."

Pacholk told the nurses that with all the moving parts associated with the needs of nurses and healthcare workers, the nursing delegates in the room needed to support Convention Resolution 15.

Resolution 15 was considered by the full delegation on Oct. 21 and 22 and it was recommended that PEF President Spence refer it to a committee for further consideration. It would create a new director-level position at PEF called the Director of Nursing and Healthcare. The director would oversee the Nurse Coordinator and be a liaison between other union departments like Organizing and Field Services, to help lead advocacy campaigns focused on nurses and healthcare members.

Pacholk also took time to honor Nora Higgins, who is retiring as Nurse Coordinator.

"Nora Higgins is a special person," said Pacholk. "Thank you, Nora, for your service as a nurse, an educator, a PEF steward of Division 225, a delegate to the Long Island Federation of Labor, a member of the Professional Nursing Association of Suffolk County, the PEF Region

12 Coordinator, PEF SUNY Labor Management Chair, PEF Statewide Nursing Chair, the PEF Nurse Coordinator and a constant advocate."



Pacholk thanked Higgins for sharing her institutional knowledge with fellow nurses over the years, as well as her leadership and dedication.

Pacholk then welcomed attorney Alex Dell to discuss Workers' Compensation benefits. Pacholk said that nurses and healthcare workers are likely not fully taking advantage of their robust workers' compensation benefits.

"I have had multiple nurses call me after getting injured or assaulted on the job and ask about next steps," she said. "And while I thanked them for calling me, I do ask why they do not use their workers' compensation benefits. Most time, they do not know they have the option."

During his presentation, Dell briefly covered the benefits available to PEF members, including nurses, but focused on the updated Workers' Compensation Law in New York, including the changes to mental health coverage.

"Prior to June 4, 2025, if you alleged that you had a mental health condition from your employment, either from a singular event or over time due to the nature of your work, you would be denied a claim because it would not be considered beyond normal and ordinary for your work," said Dell. "They would deny the claim and say, 'you signed up for this'. Well, June 4, 2025, has changed the landscape for the better."

PEF advocated strongly for the change, and now acute, major depressive, and post-traumatic stress disorders are all covered and compensable under the Workers' Compensation law.



Convention luncheon honors veterans

By KATE STICKLES

It was a full house for the annual Veterans' Luncheon at Convention, save for one chair left empty at a small table set for one, in recognition and honor of prisoners of war and comrades missing in action, a dignified and solemn symbol at many formal dinners and occasions.

"This is our way of symbolizing the fact that some are missing from our midst," said Veterans Committee member Bruce Jagroop, an occupational and environmental therapy specialist at Roswell Park in Buffalo. "They are commonly called prisoners of war and missing in action, but we call them brothers. They are unable to be here today, so we remember them."

Veterans' Committee chairman David Krobe, who is the president of PEF Retirees in Region 1, was unable to attend, so committee member Christopher Buman, a real property analyst at Tax & Finance in Batavia, conducted the Missing Man Table ceremony. He explained each item on the table and its significance — from the small size of the table, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his oppressors; to the single red rose displayed in a vase, reminding us of the families and loved ones keeping the faith, awaiting their return.

This year, Jeffrey Todd, a veterans' benefits advisor in the Potsdam office of the New York State Department of Veterans Services, not to be confused with the federal Veterans Administration or VA, spoke to attendees about services the state provides and advised them to contact the New York State Veterans Services Office nearest them for assistance.



"There are two types of VSOs, state and county," Todd said. "County offices only work within their county. State offices work throughout the state, and we can also go outside the state as far as representation, so if you have a veteran that moves around, it's always best to divert them to the state office."

The PEF Veterans Committee also includes Troy Decker, a municipal auditor with the Comptroller's Office, Retirees Representative Robert Harms and PEF Associate Counsel Ben Traslaviña.



First-time Convention delegates surge in 2025

By **NAJEE WALKER**



PEF's 47th Annual Convention saw nearly 700 delegates take part in plenary sessions and workshops at the Olympic Center and various hotels around Lake Placid. More than 200 of those delegates participated for the first time.

We caught up with a few of the delegates to get a sense of why they chose to join the union's highest decision-making body this year.

"I really want to help contribute and to effect positive change within the union," said **Aiesha Quick, a parole officer in Queens**. "I learned a lot about the resolutions and the voting process."

Quick has been a PEF member for 10 years and has worked for DOCCS for about four years. She is already involved in Health and Safety and Labor-Management meetings at her office and felt that attending Convention would be a chance to meet new members.

Adam Warrenchak is a Contract Management Specialist with the Office of the State Comptroller in Albany. He has been a PEF member for seven years and with the Comptroller's Office for about two-and-a-half-years. He was recently elected to the PEF Executive Board.

"Convention is where the entire membership really has a voice," he said. "I wanted to be here because it's one of the rare times when so many PEF members from across the state come together. It is a chance to hear different perspectives, share concerns from my division, and learn from others who face different challenges."

Joseph Moynihan works at the Department of Veterans Services in Buffalo. He is also an Executive Board member. As a board member, he was familiar with parliamentary procedure and PEF's adherence to Robert's Rules of Order, but with hundreds of other delegates in the room, the rules looked very different.

"I did not recognize how big the scale was going to be, so it was definitely a new experience to recognize just how many people are involved in this process, as well as the sheer consolidation of everyone throughout the state," he said.

First-time delegates had the goals of their members from their home regions in mind as they traveled to Lake Placid. For **Sandy Darby-Roberts, an Employment Counselor with the Department of Labor in Region 11**, the contract was top of mind for her constituents.

"Everyone is worried about raises and the federal cuts. Those were some of the major issues that my members were concerned about," said Darby-Roberts.

She was given some hope after hearing about New York's ability to absorb some of the impacts from those cuts from speakers at convention.

"I think it's great, the fact that there's a little bit of a cushion—my grandma would always say that it's good to keep a little something for a rainy day—so it's great that we have that to lean on," she said.

Moynihan feels the same but added that he thinks the state has the back of both state and federal workers during this unprecedented time.

"There are obviously some concerns with federal deficits affecting us in the state, but from what I have heard over the last couple of days, I feel pretty confident we'll be able to weather that," he said. "And then make sure we still have the necessary steps in place to ensure safety, welfare, fair wages and respect for our workers."

Each delegate said that they learned a lot and even had some fun at Convention. Quick said although she didn't get too involved on the convention floor, she looks forward to coming back next year.

"I think it was an absolute fabulous experience, I learned so much about Robert's Rules of Order, I did candle making, we had boots on the ground—there were so many other activities to do—it was a great experience, and I would definitely do it again."

Warrenchak hopes that even more people get involved next year when Convention takes place in Niagara Falls.

"The union is only as strong as its members," he said. "When more people get involved, we get more perspectives and stronger decisions. Even if someone doesn't run for a delegate or board seat, attending meetings or helping on a committee makes a difference. The more members we have engaged, the more power we have at the bargaining table and in shaping our future."

Editor's Note: The 48th PEF Convention will take place Oct. 18-21, 2026, in Niagara Falls. Keep an eye on your email and the [PEF website](#) for information in the Spring of 2026 about how to petition to become a delegate.

Congratulations Danielle Bridger



Bridger takes the oath of office to become ACCFL President at the Albany Labor Temple on Nov. 5, 2025.

PEF Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger was sworn in as President of the Albany County Central Federation of Labor on November 5. Danielle has been a member of ACCFL since 2022 and has served as Secretary of the Board for the past three years. Congratulations, Danielle!



We are all in this together

By JIM CARR – President, PEF Statewide Retirees

I've just returned home from this year's PEF Convention in Lake Placid, where I addressed the delegates at the invitation of President Wayne Spence. The focus of this year's speech was to educate members so they can better serve their members. Retirees have walked in their shoes and someday they'll be walking in our shoes. Our experiences will be similar to their experiences.

Retirees also contribute generously to [COPE](#) because we understand the importance of political education. We attend rallies, participate in phone banks, and are always willing to lend a helping hand. We also volunteer in our communities, building relationships. We are a daytime army of 20,000+ members and we have a very active and engaged membership.

I humbly suggest that the Regional Coordinators of PEF collaborate with their [retiree chapter presidents](#) in order to build a brighter future. Many locals have fascinating backstories, such as contract battles, strikes, or organizing struggles.

I spoke Tuesday morning at the Convention following some great union leaders like AFT President Randi Weingarten and New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento. I fully embraced their messaging on unity, collaboration, and forming your opinions on issues rather than partisan rhetoric. We must understand the issues that are impacting our lives and our future. We must make sure what we learn is grounded in reality and not manufactured misinformation.

For example, quality affordable healthcare -- maintaining and preserving it is an area of interest where retirees and active members need to move together. Currently, health insurance in retirement is administered by the New York State Department of Civil Service. The New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP) is an employer-sponsored benefit plan that is subsidized by New York State. Because of the proposed cuts to health care in the federal government's "One Big Beautiful Bill," the future of healthcare is uncertain. Cuts to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid will have an impact on all Americans regardless of their political views or where they live. These cuts will affect millions of Americans.

Retirees are also politically engaged because we understand we're affected by political decisions. We know how important it is to support our union-endorsed candidates because they are thoroughly vetted during PEF's rigorous endorsement process -- first at the Regional level, then the Statewide Political Action Committee, and lastly the Executive Board. Candidates from both parties are sent a questionnaire and it's their responsibility to return it if they want our endorsement.

Your union only endorses candidates who support our values and the policies that best serve the members. We support candidates who support a campaign of common cause over chaos, regardless of party. Unfortunately, the party in charge in Washington seems to thrive on chaos and division. We would rather have unity and cooperation, with diversity and commitment. We support candidates who support working people, public employees and our union, not candidates who say one thing and when we check their voting record it doesn't match their rhetoric.

I believe in this year's convention theme "Stronger Roots, Bolder Future" and I appreciated the opportunity to address the delegates at Convention. Retirees appreciate our union's continued support and the shared commitment to a future where we can all have a secure retirement.

In conclusion, here are a few facts about New York State public retirees and beneficiaries: 79% -- more than 400,000 people -- choose to stay in New York State and contribute to the economy. We're responsible for \$18.2 billion in economic activity. We paid \$2.3 billion in property taxes that help fund road repairs, school budgets, and government services. We generated \$881 million in state and local sales taxes and spent \$15.7 billion within New York State, supporting an estimated 78,400 jobs.*

In Solidarity,
Jim Carr

**Statistics courtesy of [NYSLRS](#) and the Office of the NYS Comptroller, Thomas P. DiNapoli)*

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.

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

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.

Sally Fontana is social work supervisor 1, LCSW at Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center in Utica. To obtain a donation form, email MVPersonnel@omh.ny.gov.

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.

Kathleen Hill is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse. Email leaves@upstate.edu to obtain a donation form.

Hannah Kennedy is an information technology specialist 2 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany. Email HR.LeaveManagement@its.ny.gov to obtain a donation form.

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.

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.

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.

Christine Thayer is a MITS 1 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.

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

JoAnn Waldrop is a business systems analyst 1 at the Worker's Compensation Board in Schenectady.

Nicole Welch is an auditor trainee 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance 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, or call 518-785-1900.









