

Vol. 43

The COMMUNICATOR

No. 11

DECEMBER 2025

Year in Review

20 — 25

Jan ————— Dec

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protecting:
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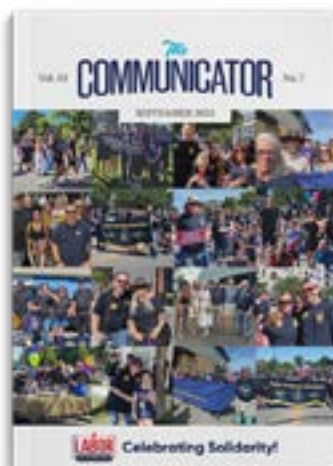
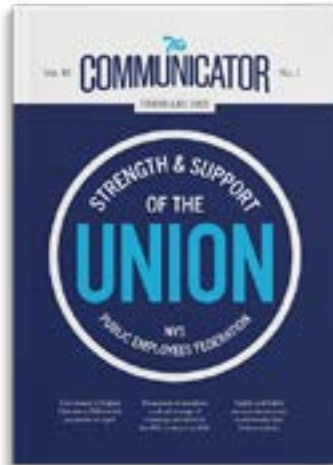


Table of Contents

The President's Message	3
Advocating, lobbying, protecting: PEF was busy in 2025	4
Eboard votes to send Albany Housing Authority tentative agreement to members for ratification	7
PEF is in strong financial position, supporting members and the community	8
Retired PEF member reflects on the good of DOOCS programming and the fight for safety	12
PEF member earns settlement for discrimination faced at DFS	14
PEF working to fill Nurse Coordinator position	15
Telephone Town Hall covers health insurance increases	16
Jet Dental clinics coming to Cattaraugus County in the New Year	18
PEF assists members impacted by DOCCS closure, consolidation	19
A year of growth, networking, and learning for Statewide Women's Committee	20
Do you want to be a union leader? Executive Board special election coming in January	22
New Steward training seeks to prepare stewards for frontline union duties	24
Blast from the Past: PEF members say, 'Give Us a Fair Contract Now!'	26
My first SOMOS, 25 years in the making	31
ITS delegates share value of PEF Convention	32
PEF member collects donations for Hurricane Melissa relief in Jamaica	34
RAISE Act will protect New Yorkers from unchecked AI	36
PEF members put street medic training to good use	37
Leave Donation Program offers hope to members in need	38
Stay Organized in 2026: Your Ultimate Holiday, Pay Schedule & Contact Info Calendar!	39
Retirees in Action: Analyzing the state's fiscal outlook and sharing useful resources for elder services	40
Letters to the Editor	42
Your fellow members need your leave donations	46
Photo Highlights	47

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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



2025 in one word? Solidarity!

What a year it's been for your union! From the wildcat strike at DOCCS, to speaking out against federal budget cuts, to saving SUNY Downstate, PEF truly did it in 2025. Together with our parent unions AFT and SEIU, we showed New York what it means to stand up and advocate for workers. Thank you for the solidarity and support you showed me and all your union siblings this past year. We've pulled together [highlights from each month of 2025 in this issue](#).

Last week, the PEF Executive Board met for its [final quarterly meeting](#) of the year in Albany, receiving updates from the Secretary-Treasurer about union finances, PEF Organizing about the remarkable growth we enjoyed in 2025 (55,000+ dues-paying members, and climbing!), and the PEF Legislative Department about the State and Federal budget outlook.

The board also discussed the 2025 PEF Convention, after watching [this video that summarized it so beautifully](#). I heard from many delegates how much they enjoyed their time in Lake Placid. The Convention Committee is already planning for 2026, so mark your calendars for Oct. 18-21 in Niagara Falls! Nothing says Union Strong like more (and new!) delegates year after year.

Also in this issue, we celebrate a [\\$545,000 settlement](#) for former PEF member Deidre Manns, who worked with the consultant assigned to PEF's Joint Affirmative Action Advisory Committee, Eric Josey, to obtain legal representation for her discrimination claims against the Department of Financial Services. It's proof of SEIU's slogan that "when we fight, we win!"

Finally, every year ends with some goodbyes and the promise of new beginnings. I'd personally like to thank PEF Executive Director Todd Kerner and Health & Safety Director Geraldine Stella for their decades of service to all PEF members. Both are retiring in early 2026 and their guidance and professionalism will be deeply missed.

The work of the union goes on, however, and I encourage all members to keep an eye on our [Careers Page](#) to see if jobs at PEF are a good fit for you or someone you know.

Whatever your traditions, I wish you and your families a restful and peaceful holiday season, and look forward to welcoming in the New Year, which will mark the start of my 12th year as PEF president. Thank you again for trusting me to lead this remarkable union.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President

Year in *Review*

20 —
— 25

Jan ————— Dec

Advocating, lobbying, protecting: PEF was busy in 2025

By KATE STICKLES

From historic investments in Brooklyn healthcare, to protecting the safety of members across the state, to lobbying and rallies for PEF budget and legislative priorities, PEF had a busy year in 2025! We've rounded up a few of the top stories from each issue of the *Communicator* to celebrate our successes, big and small.

January 2025

- [Community rallies for positive change and investment at first SUNY Downstate advisory board public hearing](#): Hundreds show up at a rally to support quality healthcare in Brooklyn and surrounding communities.
- [PEF releases report on privatization and austerity in the mental health sector](#): As part of the ongoing "Fund Our Future" campaign, the union collaborated with researchers from the Worker Institute and Cornell's ILR School to release a white paper, "Diminishing New York State's Public Mental Healthcare Sector," which found that anemic budgets and privatization are costing the State good union jobs, especially among women and African-Americans.

February 2025

- [Coalition of unions, clergy and legislators seek transparency and investment for SUNY Downstate](#): The coalition formed to Save SUNY Downstate comes together in Albany to attend public hearings and lobby at the State Capitol.
- [PEF testifies at Civil Service commission meeting](#): While PEF supports recruitment and retention efforts, the State's extension of the NY HELPS program prompts the union to go on record with its concerns.

March 2025

- [PEF protecting members during correctional facility work stoppages across the state](#): When news broke of wildcat strikes by corrections officers across the state, PEF rallied to protect members working at correctional facilities impacted by the strikes.
- [PEF to legislators: Act now to bolster the state workforce](#): Vice President Randi DiAntonio participates in a joint legislative hearing to urge lawmakers to fix Tier 6, build capacity in the Civil Service Department, and strengthen protections against workplace bullying, to name a few union priorities.
- [PEF members visit State Capitol for annual Lobby Day](#): PEF nurses and additional titles flock to Albany to make their voices heard during Lobby Day, giving first-hand testimony on working conditions.

April 2025

- [PEF monitoring DOCCS's decision to grant early parole](#): In reaction to the wildcat strike, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision granted early parole to some incarcerated individuals and PEF is keeping a close eye on how that impacts parole officers.
- [PEF joins thousands of union members for Stop the Cuts march in NYC](#): Thousands take to the streets of New York City to protest drastic cuts to federal funding for State services, including more than 50 PEF members.
- [PEF unveils S.T.O.M.P. inflatable bull as part of Stop Workplace Bullying initiative](#): The 20-foot-tall bull debuted at the quarterly Executive Board meeting, a striking symbol in the union's fight against toxic workplaces.

May 2025

- [PEF stands strong after assault at Pilgrim Psychiatric Center](#): When a PEF nurse was brutally attacked at Pilgrim Psychiatric Center in Brentwood, N.Y., it's all-hands-on-deck to support her and her family.
- [PEF asked to share successful tactics for increasing membership with SEIU Public Division Labor Boards](#): As part of SEIU's Together We Rise initiative, PEF stands out for its success at signing up new members and shared some of the ways we do it with fellow unions.
- [VP Bruce Giddings joins unions, community on May Day to protest federal cuts, support health care workers](#): On May Day, PEF Vice President Bruce Giddings takes up the microphone at a multi-union rally at Albany Medical Center in support of health care workers.

June 2025

- [From field to lab: PEF members play an integral part in studying unique mastodon fossil](#): Members at the New York State Museum share details of their work on a mastodon find in Orange County, taking PEF inside the lab for a first-hand look.
- [Long fight for salary upgrades at Division of Labor Standards ends with a victory](#): It took time, but PEF members prevailed at the Department of Labor, achieving salary upgrades for several titles.
- [PEF testifies on safety, transparency and accountability at DOCCS facilities](#): President Wayne Spence speaks out for members on the ground at correctional facilities, testifying before a joint legislative hearing panel on assaults on staff and how lack of safety impacts recruitment and retention issues.

July/August 2025

- [PEF members at DOCCS and OMH CBOs strategize about path forward at correctional facilities](#): The union brought together stakeholders from correctional facilities and corrections-based Office of Mental Health staff to talk about what goes on “Behind the Walls” and strategize solutions.
- [Compensation study underway by Civil Service; PEF closely monitoring the process](#): PEF is keeping a close eye on the state’s compensation study and supporting members who wish to initiate salary upgrade proposals (PEF does not directly negotiate salary grades, but created a toolkit for members to learn how to advocate for pay increases).
- [President Spence joins Governor to celebrate \\$1.1 billion investment in SUNY Downstate](#): PEF is on stage in Brooklyn when Gov. Kathy Hochul announced the historic investment in SUNY Downstate, reflecting the tireless work of a coalition of unions, clergy, and the community.
- [PEF scientist secures \\$9M grant to study human immune response to Lyme disease bacteria with an eye toward treatment](#): Our members do amazing work on far-reaching issues like Lyme disease and took us into the lab for a look.

September 2025

- [PEF members turn out for Labor Day celebrations statewide](#): A strong showing on Labor Day is a crucial tool in the union toolkit to garner public support and shine a light on important issues.
- [Negotiated end to sunsets keeps benefits active even after contract expiration](#): In the last round of contract negotiations, the Contract Team managed to secure continuation of several benefits beyond contract expiration, eliminating those sunsets.
- [Nurse attacked while working at South Beach Psychiatric Center shares his story](#): Peter Shiffman’s life changed on September 17, 2024, and we spoke to him and shared his story as a reminder of the challenges members face in mental health facilities.

October 2025

- [HALT Committee releases recommendations for reform](#): Our DOCCS leaders play a pivotal role in coming up with proposed amendments to the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement (HALT) Act.
- [Legacy of former PEF member lives on in history](#): Long-time PEF member Dorothy E. Reid lived a life that helped shape the future of the United States as part of the landmark Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case that forced public schools to desegregate.
- [PEF brings together labor, management for training on workers’ comp](#): Protecting members is the cornerstone of unions, which is why PEF created an interactive two-day workers’ compensation training conference for both labor and management personnel.

November 2025

- [Civil Service roundtables spotlight recruitment and retention and concerns about NY HELPS](#): Staff and leaders participated in Civil Service roundtables across the State to spotlight recruitment and retention issues and concerns about the NY HELPS program.
- [State of the Union reflects PEF’s Stronger Roots, Bolder Future](#): PEF shattered recent Convention attendance numbers, as nearly 700 delegates set the union’s course for a busy year ahead. We published a [special issue of the Communicator about all things Convention](#).



By KATE STICKLES

At its meeting on Dec. 4, 2025, the PEF Executive Board moved to advance a one-year tentative agreement — featuring a 2% salary increase and improved personal leave — for Albany Housing Authority members (Division 503) to a ratification vote.

“This is a one-year extender agreement to make sure we got money into our members’ pockets now,” said Field Representative Caitlin Janiszewski, who led seven months of negotiations with the federally funded Authority, which has and continues to face threats to its funding. The team was comprised of long-time union leader Michael Rimmer, as well as some newly involved members, Tom Weinheimer, Peter Chiarella, along with PEF Contract Administration Associate Counsel Ben Traslavina.

In addition to the 2% retroactive salary increase, the agreement contains a change to the method by which personal leave is granted. Previously, employees were permitted to use five personal days per year, but the fourth and fifth day had to be drawn from sick leave, which in effect meant they only had three purely personal days of leave. The agreement eliminates the requirement to use sick leave.

If ratified, asset managers still serving as Grade 12 would be upgraded to Grade 14, without having to complete five years of service as previously required, and new hires would start at Grade 14.

There were some minor givebacks on leave without pay provisions and education benefits.

Albany Housing Authority is one of several smaller units represented by PEF. This tentative agreement would run from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026.



A group shot of the PEF Executive Board, taken on Dec. 5, 2025, at the Albany Hilton.

PEF is in strong financial position, supporting members and the community

By **KATE STICKLES**

The Executive Board held its quarterly meeting December 4 and 5 in Albany with a full agenda of business and updates. They sent a tentative agreement to Albany Housing Authority members for ratification; discussed current issues at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision; and were briefed on union finances and Jamaican relief efforts.

Albany Housing Authority agreement

The board voted to send a tentative one-year agreement to the members of PEF Division 503 at Albany Housing Authority, one of several smaller units PEF represents outside of the PS&T contract.

[The agreement](#) features a 2% raise and improvements to personal leave, with a few minor givebacks.

Union finances, membership

PEF received a favorable audit from the Bonadio Group, with no material weaknesses discovered. Auditors reported no issues with investments and said the organization's total net assets of \$13.8 million will "allow PEF to weather any storms in the future and put the union in a good financial position."

Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue echoed the sentiment.

"PEF has never been in a stronger position than it is today and that is because of the good work of the members," he said, reporting a cash balance at the end of the quarter of more than \$31.6 million of net cash and investments, with dues income \$872,000 over budget as membership exceeded projections.



There were several line items over budget, including Employee Organizational Leave, computer fees, occupancy, parking and scholarship expenses, but these were largely due to the timing of the charges.

"Current assets show the fiscal strength of the union," Donahue said.

Director of Organizing Scott Harms reported membership stood at 55,705 as of Nov. 7, 2025, up from 53,976 at the end of 2024.

"We have continued to add new members to our bargaining unit and grow the power of our union," he said. "We need everyone's help to make sure new members are signed up timely, so please reach out to new hires when they start at your locations. We are

also focusing our efforts on permanent nonmembers through organizers, Division leaders, and Regional Coordinators.”

Harms also shared a new one-page PEF application that includes both membership and COPE signups. It is available on the PEF [website](#) or via the Resources tab in the [app](#). Since the form went live in May, PEF has gained nearly 250 COPE contributors. COPE, the Committee on Political Education, helps PEF advocate for federal legislation, funding and policies that support union priorities – union dues cannot be used for federal lobbying.

Jamaican disaster relief

President Wayne Spence reported out on relief efforts following the massive category 5 hurricane that devastated portions of Jamaica in late October, with PEF raising approximately \$22,000 in collaboration with parent union AFT.



“We raised that money under the AFT umbrella, not the PEF Relief Fund, which is specifically for PEF members,” he said. “PEF is the only union I know under AFT that is leading an effort like this.” (Members may still donate using this [link](#).)

Of the money raised, \$20,000 has been released to the Jamaican Teachers Union, to support the island’s school system and counter a push for privatizing the system, which would force kids to travel to city centers for education.

PEF Executive Board member Joan Rosegreen, a nurse at SUNY Downstate, traveled to Jamaica in October as part of a medical mission and rode out the storm, unable to return home for almost a month.

“For you to see it and experience it, it’s really traumatic,” she told the board. “The day after the hurricane, we went out into the community and got involved.”

In the western section of the island, Rosegreen said five parishes were hit particularly hard, reducing centuries-old buildings to rubble.

“Be assured that when your money goes to the Jamaican Teachers Association, it’s being used for the kids,” she said.

RELATED STORY: [PEF member in Albany delivers Jamaican relief](#)

DOCCS updates

President Spence played two videos for the board. The first was [silent footage from various body cams](#) worn by staff during the fatal beating of Robert Brooks on Dec. 9, 2024, at Marcy Correctional Facility, followed by the president’s testimony before a joint legislative hearing in May that was convened in reaction to Brooks’ murder.

While his testimony focused on suicides, short-staffing, and safety and security for staff at correctional facilities, legislators turned the discussion to abuses of incarcerated individuals. President Spence said PEF supports increasing the use of fixed and body-worn cameras, which prompted a shakeup in PEF leadership at DOCCS.

“I welcome cameras, it would make everybody transparent,” President Spence told the board. “What came out of what took place with Robert Brooks is a changed trajectory on how people view corrections.”

Highlights from the president’s panel testimony on May 14, 2025, can be viewed [here](#).

The president next invited new DOCCS Statewide Labor-Management Co-Chairs Tanya Oliver and Lori Greenizen to discuss the closure of Bare Hills Correctional Facility and consolidation of Collins.

Greenizen and Oliver said no members would be laid off following the November 18 announcement that Bare Hill Correctional Facility in Malone would close and Collins Correctional Facility in Gowana would be consolidated from two facilities separated by a road into one campus.

“All they are doing at Collins is taking staff from one side and consolidating them with the other side,” Greenizen said. “It will help increase security and no staff are being transferred away.”

PEF attended the Reduction in Force meetings at Bare Hill, where 59 members are impacted. With two large correctional facilities (Franklin and Upstate) with vacancies in close proximity to Bare Hill, job losses are not expected.

President Spence also reported a successful walkthrough at Fishkill Correctional Facility in Dutchess County in October after exposures necessitated EMS transport to area hospitals and angered residents of the town concerned with diverting resources to the facility. PEF pushed back on efforts to force members through a full decontamination process at the facility, which would have necessitated full strip downs and showers.

Legislative updates, letter campaign

With several of PEF’s priority bills on Gov. Kathy Hochul’s desk for signing, the importance of legislative advocacy is apparent, and members are urged to visit the PEF website and [send letters of support to the governor](#).

Federal funding cuts loom over state agencies that depend on federal dollars, said Legislative Director Pat Lyons. In the end, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act accomplished two different things – it cut federal spending by \$2 trillion over the next 10 years, and it spent \$4.5 trillion on individual and corporate tax cuts over that same period.

“When talking about the federal tax cut package in the OBBBA, we didn’t get as big a piece of the pie as we think is appropriate for our PEF members,” he said. “The biggest slice of the tax cut pie went to the few New Yorkers who need tax relief the least – those with incomes over \$400,000 per year.”

“On the federal spending cut side, the large reductions in federal support enacted in OBBBA may very well result in significant reductions in program spending in the out years,” Lyons added.

Early State budget projections were dire, but Lyons told the board revenues are up and this year is close to a balanced budget for the state. Trouble really ramps up in 2027-28, when Medicaid cuts hit and New York is looking at the potential for a \$10-15 billion deficit even if the economy stays on track. “The Medicaid cuts enacted in the OBBBA don’t take effect until January 2027, so we are hopeful that some improvements may still be possible,” Lyons added.

“We have a lot of asks, including a good contract and Tier 6 improvements,” Lyons said. “We can’t recruit and retain staff with the current Tier 5 and 6 pension systems. We have broad support for changes, the question is how to pay for them given the out-year budget gaps. PEF will keep advocating for changes while also recognizing the broader budget picture may limit the size and scope of the potential changes.”

There will be a multi-union rally to push for fixes to Tier 6 on March 8, 2026, in Albany.



PEF Secretary Treasurer Joe Donahue bestowed retirement gifts on H&S Director Geraldine Stella and Executive Director Todd Kerner.

Staffing updates, farewells

President Spence recognized two long-time staff members, Health and Safety Director Geraldine Stella and Executive Director Todd Kerner, who recently announced their retirements.

In October, PEF hired Omotolani (Tolani) Elumade to serve as Director of Human Resources, who most recently served as Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Operations at the state Department of Financial Services, where as a senior advisor she played a key role in supporting strategic planning and oversight across several critical divisions—including IT, HR, DEI, compliance, training, and emergency management.

This was the final Executive Board meeting of 2025. The first one of 2026 will be held March 26 and 27 in Albany.

Editor’s Note: The end of the year always brings with it several board retirements, so check the union’s [Elections page](#) to see if there is a vacancy in your agency.



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A collection of landscaped and greenhouse flowers featured in a NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Facebook post on June 28, 2024.

Retired PEF member reflects on the good of DOCCS programming and the fight for safety

By NAJEE WALKER

One of PEF's top priorities when it comes to improving working conditions and protecting its members at DOCCS is the delivery of quality programming to incarcerated individuals. Currently, DOCCS offers 97 different programs to prepare individuals for a return to society. They range from hands-on training in marketable skills like barbering, to adult education and aggression replacement training,

At a legislative hearing in May 2025 that was called after the death of incarcerated individual Robert Brooks following a recorded beating at the hands of correctional officers, President Wayne Spence told lawmakers that programming not only helps lower the rate of recidivism, but it also helps mitigate issues related to solitary confinement.

"Some of the best outcomes when being moved out of solitary confinement are programming," President Spence said. "(When correctional facilities are fully staffed) there is either one-on-one, individual therapy sessions or group sessions all the time."

Fifteen years ago, a now popular horticulture program designed to train individuals to grow, transplant, prune, cultivate and fertilize plants arrived in DOCCS facilities. Retired PEF member Steve Drake helped individuals begin their journey working with plants.

"We are teaching the population to build life skills relative to what they need to do to function in the workplace," said Drake, "as well as trade knowledge relative to the variety of trades offered in the horticulture program, one of them being in the greenhouse industry."

Drake retired in September after working as an educator at DOCCS for more than 30 years. He started as a vocational instructor in 1994 before becoming an educational supervisor in 2019. As a PEF member, Drake served on the executive board and co-chaired the DOCCS Labor-Management Committee.

Drake said educators are on the frontline working closely with incarcerated individuals in order to rehabilitate their lives and prepare them for reentry into society. It is often through programming that these individuals become successful once they leave DOCCS facilities.

The horticulture program offers a chance for individuals to learn how to work in greenhouses, as groundskeepers, as plant propagators, and even landscapers and pavers. As part of the program, the flowers produced by incarcerated individuals help to decorate state buildings across New York including the Capitol Building and the Governor's Mansion in Albany, various New York State Trooper's Barracks, and the State Fairgrounds in Syracuse.

"The program has continued to grow over the years," said Drake. "We started growing for the Fairgrounds about seven years ago. We basically grow for every central office in Albany."

A more recent off shoot of the horticulture program is the nationwide Harvest Now program. The program began nationwide in 2008, focusing on food scarcity in the United

States by encouraging correctional facilities, schools and religious institutions to plant, grow and donate food from their grounds to local shelters and food banks. In 2016, New York State correctional facilities joined the Harvest Now program and 14 DOCCS facilities currently participate.

"This is really what I want people to know about the programs we provide at DOCCS," said Drake. "The agency as a whole continues to try to provide the ability for the population to be successful when they go home through these programs. We want them to do well."

Even though Drake is retired, he plans to support PEF's advocacy efforts at DOCCS. He believes that as long as DOCCS remains so short-staffed, the needs of everyone who works behind the walls will be great. He is hopeful that PEF and DOCCS will continue to have a good working relationship and build a better, safer future.

"My work with the union and the department—as hard as the work was that we did—we've always had the ability to have good dialogue. That doesn't mean we won every battle, but we have always been able to express our concerns to the department and try to resolve things together," said Drake. "Sometimes we're bound by law, and the dynamics at DOCCS have changed in the last few years relative to that, but we're still trying to come up with solutions to make it a safer place for our members, which is the union's biggest concern."

Editor's Note: Tanya Oliver, a teacher at Elmira Correctional Facility, and Lori Greenizen, an Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator at Cape Vincent Correctional, now co-chair the DOCCS Labor-Management Committee. Find your agency's L-M chairs, [here](#).



PEF member earns settlement for discrimination faced at DFS

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Article 36 of PEF's collective bargaining agreement with New York State is known as the "No Discrimination Article." It establishes a Joint Affirmative Action Advisory Committee (JAAAC) staffed by the union and the State.

Eric Josey works with the JAAAC as a consultant. He advises PEF members who feel they have been discriminated against at work. Recently, he was referred to a former employee from the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Deidre Manns, after she experienced several counts of discrimination as one of three Black employees in her agency.

"This case actually came to me from President Spence. Deidre was an investigator with an impressive resume," said Josey. "When I got the case, I found it to be very credible."

Manns was hired by DFS in 2016 as a Financial Fraud Investigator in the Criminal Investigative Unit of the Consumer Protection and Financial Enforcement Division. She was assigned to a team that worked on an FBI Health Care Task Force to investigate instances of medical insurance fraud. Before working with DFS, Manns did similar fraud investigation work for the New York City Human Resources Administration Department of Social Services. Over the course of her tenure with DFS, Manns received several accolades for her work in performance reviews.

Despite the glowing praise, however, Manns said that over time colleagues and supervisors referred to her with race and gender slurs, sabotaged her work and called her in to work while she was on sick leave. She was also denied promotions, including possible succession of her supervisor when they retired in 2019.

Following those incidents of discrimination, Manns filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) based on the treatment she endured while at DFS. During the course of the EEOC complaint, Manns was suspended without pay, citing a policy violation. When she was reinstated, she also filed a complaint with the New York State Division of Human Rights (DHR) claiming that the suspension was in retaliation for the prior EEOC complaint. She was again suspended without pay and following the DHR investigation, the arbitrator ruled in favor of DHS. Manns was terminated from DFS as a result.

"I worked with Deidre to get a law firm to pursue the matter in court," said Josey. "I was able to refer her to a very reputable law firm that handled her case."

With Josey's referral and the help of attorneys at [Outten and Golden](#), Manns' case proceeded through the legal system all the way to the New York State Supreme Court in 2022. A settlement was reached in September 2025 and Manns was awarded \$545,000 in back pay, lost wages, pension payments, and other damages.

"This is really historic for New York and any state agency to settle a case for this amount of money," said Josey. "Unfortunately, Deidre is no longer with DFS as a result, but she is ready to move on from the agency."

Editor's Note: If you feel you've been discriminated against at work, the first step is to [fill out this intake form](#) and PEF staff will follow up to discuss next steps.

PEF working to fill Nurse Coordinator position

By **NAJEE WALKER**

In 1998 under the administration of former PEF President Roger Benson, PEF established the Nurse Organizer position, a full-time staff position responsible for organizing and empowering PEF nurses. Today, that position is called the Nurse Coordinator. Nora Higgins is currently doing the job but will be retiring by the end of the year and PEF is now seeking someone to fill the position as she looks ahead to her retirement.

“Nora has done incredible work,” said Region 1 Coordinator and Statewide Nurses Committee Co-Chair Vincent Cicatello. “She has instilled a lot of integrity in nurses and has helped us to confidently carry out the duties required by the Statewide Nurses Committee. She has taught us how to be supportive of our nurses and given us tools and strategies to bring our concerns to management across all our facilities.”

Cicatello believes that the nurse coordinator ensures that PEF nurses are heard and represented. The position helps to align the goals for the approximately 11,000 members of PEF who are nurses or work in a healthcare-related title.

Higgins played a key role this year in modernizing a common form used by nurses, called a [Protest of Assignment or POA](#). POAs help nurses protect their license by putting them on the record when they’ve been asked to do something out-of-title or unsafe.

“We have been educating people about how to properly fill out a POA form digitally and how to give notice so that they can effectively protect themselves while still providing services,” said Higgins.

Higgins says her successor should expect to work with PEF’s other healthcare titles as well and should genuinely love to travel, as the work will take them all across New York State.

Debbie Egel is the Interim Regional Director of Field Services for PEF Regions 10-12. She is also a nurse attorney and has been working closely with Higgins and the Statewide Nurses Committee. Egel agrees with Higgins’ assessment of the ideal candidate and says the next nurse coordinator has big shoes to fill.

“This is a position that helps steer one-fifth of the membership. It is a big job that requires knowledge of nursing and knowledge about unions,” said Egel. “There is a lot to navigate, there are a lot of people to meet, but it is an exciting and challenging position. This is the ideal job for someone who wants a challenge. Nora was instrumental in setting up the POA database, she is very good at noticing and analyzing trends, and can respond to criticism from fellow nurses. I look forward to making sure the next coordinator can pick up where she leaves off.”

According to Egel, the next coordinator must be a nurse and should have something in their background that shows they can work with a union. Egel also said a diverse nursing background would be beneficial, as the PEF nurse coordinator will help navigate issues that affect PEF healthcare professionals across agencies.

Over the years, Higgins became an important part of Labor-Management meetings with the Office of Mental Health (OMH), Article 44 (Joint Committee on Nursing and Institutional Issues) meetings, and meetings with the New York State Office of Employee Relations (OER). She hopes more healthcare professionals and nurses, with the help of the nurse coordinator, will find their voice and have a better seat at the table.

“Even with this position working on their behalf, nurses and other healthcare professionals sometimes feel underrepresented,” said Higgins. “I have heard this from previous coordinators and from the members. I think we have done a great job in making sure we represent our members, and we fight on a daily basis. I hope that we can continue to do that work and change the way we think about healthcare in the union at the same time.”

Editor’s Note: To apply to any open PEF position, please visit the union’s [Careers Page](#).



Telephone Town Hall covers health insurance increases

By KATE STICKLES

Just before Thanksgiving, PEF learned there would be a 9.6% increase in New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP) premiums in 2026, and President Wayne Spence hosted a telephone town hall December 1 to address the increases and outline useful benefits that members can access.

The union does not negotiate the premiums themselves, that number is set by the Department of Civil Service. Unions negotiate the percentage of that premium that members pay. For individual coverage, members pay 16% and the state pays 84%. For family coverage, the employee pays 31% and the state pays 69%. With health care costs increasing around the country, insurers have increased their costs, which means the percentage paid by PEF members will also go up.

"That number for the overall premium is based on usage, health care trends, costs," said Director of Contract Administration Deb Greenberg. "Health insurance costs have been going up a lot, but that is a big increase, but it's not unusual this year. We had a government shutdown that was based in large part about a conflict about the Affordable Care Act and whether subsidies were going to be continued. Medicare is going up about 9.5%. The Affordable Care Act is going up probably over 20%.

"All around the health insurance industry, including people who have insurance through private employers, it's all going up," she said. "It's a tough year. Last year we had an increase that was significantly less than 1%. We had less than 1% because of some commonsense cost containment measures that we had negotiated about how out-of-network providers were reimbursed and so that really contained things last year."

President Spence said the premium increases are not unique to PEF.

"I want people to understand this is not a PEF specific thing," he said. "This increase is for pretty much everybody who works for New York State government and for some municipalities. We came up with something to help offset that. And over the years, we've increased that benefit so that more people can get it."

[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 deadline to sign up for next year's program is December 8, 2025.**

For those in salary grade 17 and below, they can trade in four days for \$800 credit or eight days for a \$1,600 credit. For those in salary grade 18 to 24, members can trade in two and a half days for a \$750 credit or five days for a \$1,500 credit. There is a separate program for teachers.

The dollar value of the increase for individual plans is around \$200 for the year and about \$806 annually for families.

"PEP could really offset some of that cost and help you save some money," President Spence said. "Over the years we have significantly increased the program. The contract team is going to be advocating very strongly for that again and we think we'll have some compelling arguments to get higher salary grades in light of all this."

You must obtain PEP forms from the Health Benefits Administrator at your agency.

Flex Spending Accounts

Members can also take advantage of health care spending accounts, to cover things that aren't covered by insurance, such as co-pays; the Dependent Care Advantage Account; and an adoption account. These are all pre-tax programs. Even if you don't put aside some of your own money, the state makes a contribution if you just enroll.

"Don't leave this money on the table," said President Spence. "You could get between \$600 and \$800 from the state contribution."

The deadline to sign up for these 2026 programs is also December 8, 2025. Visit this [OER website](#) to learn more and enroll.

Dental benefits

Members living in areas with few dental providers can take advantage of the Limited Access Program, which allows you to see an out-of-network provider when there is no Anthem provider in your area. Call 833-821-1949 to speak to Anthem. If you are approved you may have to pay some out-of-pocket costs, but you'll be fully reimbursed as though they were in-network.

For complete health benefits information, visit the [PEF website](#) or download the [PEF App](#).



<https://vimeo.com/1142502596>



Jet Dental clinics coming to Cattaraugus County in the New Year

By NAJEE WALKER

Jet Dental Clinics are mobile dental clinics that offer a wide range of preventative dental services including cleanings, x-rays, regular exams and more. The clinic travels to locations across the United States acting as a "pop-up." On January 20 and 21, 2026, clinics will be held in Cattaraugus County in Western New York.

New York State Dental Plan enrollees and their dependents are eligible to attend a Jet Dental Clinic. Appointments typically take about an hour. The clinic accepts Anthem Blue Cross dental insurance and will work directly with your existing dentist to share x-rays or other findings as needed.

"This is an opportunity for members who may need a service to get that service quickly and efficiently and at no extra cost to them," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "This is a way to fill the gap if you can't go to your dentist as soon as you would like or if you have a dental emergency and can't wait."

Members interested in taking advantage of Jet Dental's services [must sign up ahead of time for an appointment](#). There are limited appointments available. Jet Dental will bill Anthem Blue Cross directly once services are completed.

The clinic takes place on January 20 and 21 at the Cattaraugus County Health Department located at 1 Leo Moss Drive Suite 4010 in Olean, NY. Parking for the dental pop-up is free on the premises.

Members who have questions about services can call Anthem Blue Cross at 1-833-821-1949. Members can also call Jet Dental at 801-430-9262 or email hello@jetdental.com with any questions.



PEF assists members impacted by DOCCS closure, consolidation

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) announced November 18 that Bare Hill Correctional Facility in Franklin County will close at the end of business on March 11, 2026.

Fifty-eight (58) members of the PS&T bargaining unit currently work there. DOCCS also said Collins Correctional Facility in Erie County will be consolidated by the end of the fiscal year.

DOCCS said in its [statement](#) that “all staff assigned to Bare Hill will be offered positions at other facilities” and no staff will be laid off. While there are hundreds of vacancies at nearby facilities in Clinton and Essex counties (Upstate and Franklin), a change in employment is never easy for members.

PEF met in early December with members at Bare Hill, Franklin, Upstate and Collins Correctional Facilities to make sure they understood the procedures used by DOCCS to reassign staff during times like this. At the meetings, PEF staff answered questions and assured them the union will support all members who make career transitions.

Affected members have only until December 12, 2025, to send any revisions to their ranked choice list of facilities they prefer for transfer or reassignment. Those lists must be shared via email to an address provided by DOCCS management.

Members expressed frustration about potentially longer commutes, displacement, and overnight stays.

“The state is closing facilities, at least in part, because there are not sufficient security staff to maintain safe operations,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “New York cannot deliver needed mental health, education, addiction treatment or other services without adequate staff and the state cannot maintain appropriate staffing without enhancing the safety and security of everyone behind the walls. PEF will continue to urge policymakers to come together to identify and effectuate appropriate reforms to increase the safety and security of staff and incarcerated individuals at all DOCCS facilities.”



A year of growth, networking, and learning for Statewide Women's Committee

By **MICHELE ROSELLO, Chair**

Congratulations, we did it! We survived 2025 together!

The first half of this year presented significant challenges as we all adapted to changes under the new federal administration. The latter half of the year has been marked by growth, enhanced connections, and a strong commitment to caring for ourselves and one another.

I am pleased to share that the Statewide Women's Committee (SWC) continues to expand its membership at a remarkable rate, now boasting 100 members. In addition to ongoing recruitment efforts, the committee is dedicated to supporting women's committees across the various PEF regions. We assist with both the activation and reactivation of committees in areas seeking to renew their engagement. For those interested in contributing to these efforts, please contact me at Michele. Rosello@pef.org, providing your name and region. Kindly include "Women's Committee Reactivation" in the subject line. A meeting is planned next month (January 2026) to organize and advance these initiatives.

July 2025 was quite eventful for the SWC. Every year, the United Association for Labor Education (UALE) Women's Summer School of Unions and Worker Organizations sponsors four regional "women's schools." Downstate assistant chairperson Alison Rissing and I attended the 48th United Association for Labor Education Women's Summer School of Unions and Worker Organizations, held at Cornell University in Ithaca in early July. This event provided an excellent chance to connect with women from various unions and expand the SWC's network. The UALE Northeast Summer School for Union Women is an intensive five-day residential program designed to unite pro-labor women — including rank-and-file members, staff, and officers from unions and worker centers — to enhance their knowledge of both the American and global labor movements.

The program aims to develop participants' skills and prepare them to take on more active roles as union members and leaders.

As your chairperson, I had the pleasure of co-leading with Elizabeth Pellerito, the Director of Labor Education Program at UMass Lowell, the "Ella Baker" section during the morning sessions and Alison and I attended and participated in labor-related workshops in the afternoon. This year's theme, "Love & Resistance: Building a New World," encouraged participants to emphasize care, joy, and collective strength as crucial foundations for advancing liberation and justice. The opportunity to teach, facilitate, and empower women leaders has been a meaningful professional milestone for me. The SWC is actively fundraising to establish a scholarship that will support interested committee members in participating in this valuable leadership development experience. We are currently selling SWC T-shirts for \$25 each. If you wish to purchase, [please place your order via this page before Jan. 10, 2026.](#)



The SWC is selling these T-shirts to fund a leadership scholarship.

The committee held its first membership meeting at the end of July, where members learned about plans for the remainder of the year and discussed creating an events calendar for 2026. Members were invited to share feedback and express their interests. One subject discussed was encouraging committee members to volunteer to attend coalition meetings that are affiliated with the SWC. Active committee members who are interested and available to attend coalition meetings should email Michele.Rosello@pef.org with "Coalition Meeting" in the subject line. I encourage all committee members to participate! Lastly, a review was conducted on possible topics for a SWC Leadership Conference in the future, along with a discussion about creating a proposal for a SWC podcast that would be made available to members.

Attending the AFT Civil, Human and Women's Rights Conference, "We Are the Line: Fighting for a Better Life for All" in October of this year, provided another opportunity to expand the SWC's network. Discussions were held about the rise of authoritarianism and how building bridges of solidarity strengthens the labor movement to defend our democracy. David Huerta, President of SEIU in California, discussed his arrest during a protest at an immigration raid in Los Angeles, while Evelyn DeJesus, Executive Vice President of AFT, described being racially profiled at the airport. It is inspiring to see their bravery and resolve in upholding what is right, especially during these challenging times.

Approximately 52 SWC members attended the 47th Annual PEF Convention in Lake Placid, in October and received a t-shirt reflecting the event's theme, "Stronger Roots, Bolder Future." We staffed a table in the vendor area, which provided an opportunity to engage with both current and prospective members from across all regions. Attendees were invited to participate in Women's History Trivia and spin the wheel for prizes.

I would like to acknowledge and personally thank Regina Ng for her invaluable support in distributing survey applications to new members and facilitating the sale of raffle tickets for the Self Care and Cheer basket, which contributed funds toward the UALE Summer School Scholarship. Approximately 70 new members joined the committee through signups at the vendor table.

Additionally, to celebrate Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, the Region 8 Women's Committee collaborated with the SWC to design and distribute a Breast Cancer Awareness Button to all delegates. The buttons were handed out to delegates at registration, highlighting the committees' joint support for the cause. We hope you got yours.

The SWC Meet and Greet 2025 at Convention was also highly successful, attracting three first-time delegates. The event provided an intimate setting for existing and new committee members to convene over refreshments while Executive Council Members in attendance — Monica Moore, Upstate Assistant Chairperson, and Maureen Kozakiewicz, Treasurer — were introduced. Committee goals for the coming year were outlined, along with details about the UALE Union Women's Summer School Scholarship. Jennifer Whitehead, a new committee member and first-time delegate, was the winner of the Self Care and Cheer Basket. Thanks to the committee members who participated despite other engagements on the same evening.

There is more work to do in the new year, and the SWC is dedicated to doing it with you! We will continue to fulfill our mission by supporting members of the committee and the PEF membership at large.





Do you want to be a union leader? Executive Board special election coming in January

By KATE STICKLES

The PEF Executive Board meets quarterly and is the highest-ranking deliberative body of the union other than the annual Convention. A full Executive Board assures that all members of the union are represented and have a seat at the table for discussions and voting on the business of the union.

Petitioning begins January 5, 2026, for seven Executive Board seats.

"The PEF Executive Board reviews the union's finances, gets briefed on membership trends, department activities, campaigns and initiatives, and so much more," said President Wayne Spence. "I encourage anyone who is eligible and interested to run for election."

The vacancies are:

Seat 15: Civil Service

Seat 35: Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Seat 50: Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Seat 127: Homeland Security

Seat 161: Executive

Seat 173: Office of Information Technology Services

Seat 200: Department of Health (Helen Hayes)

Seat 505: Department of Transportation

Petitions are due by 5 p.m. January 27, 2026, and must be scanned and emailed to SpecialElections@pef.org or mailed to PEF, ATTN: Special Elections Committee, P.O. Box 12414, Albany, NY 12212-2414.

For any contested election, ballots will be mailed February 18, 2026, by the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be returned to the address listed on the return envelope no later than 5 p.m. March 11, 2026. Ballots will be counted on March 12, 2026, in New York City.

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

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



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Today**



New Steward training prepares union activists for frontline duties

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF offers steward training across all 12 of the union's regions. Each region has different training techniques and the sessions often vary based on the instructors. So when Debbie Egel started working as the Interim Organizer of Field Services for Regions 10-12, she wanted to do something to shake things up.

"I think a lot of members felt there was a lack of engagement with the material," said Egel. "The lectures were good, and the information was great, but members were not keeping up with the material. Some people were taking phone calls and checking texts. We needed a change."

Egel paired up with PEF Senior Field Representative Bradley Kolb to design a new Steward Training focused on boosting engagement and interactivity. They believed that since PEF represents thousands of professional, scientific, and technical titles, training should be better tailored to suit specific regional needs.

"I think the main issue here is one shoe does not fit all," said Kolb. "PEF represents over 3,000 titles in more than 70 different agencies. Each agency has different internal policies, memorandums of agreement, and other mechanisms. We wanted to resolve this issue by targeting specific groups of members and creating the training, so everything contained is applicable to the members in the classroom."

Egel agreed, citing that while PEF staff are typically familiar with the general practices involved with being a steward, representing the members, and problem solving, when issues arise on site, a steward is the first line of defense.

"Engagement was part of the issue, but what we wanted to make sure new stewards understood is that they are the live embodiment of the contract and of the union," said Egel. "Stewards are on the ground and know what the issues are at their agencies better than we do. We want to make sure they're equipped to handle those issues and that they know their rights and the contract."

Egel and Kolb began by going through the existing training modules that exist across each region. From there, they combined useful information from the modules and identified what was missing. The result was a mixture of lecture-based learning and interactive exercises to make the training fun and engaging but also memorable.

"It was important that we made sure that members receive and retain the training," said Kolb.

In November, Egel and Kolb were ready to launch their newly designed training. The training included exercises that went over contract language, effective communication, as well as spotting issues and filing grievances. It also included a Jeopardy style game that quizzed members on labor-management, standby vs. on-call and several key parts of the PEF contract. The focus, said Egel, was on making sure the training was interactive and expanded their basic knowledge.

"We tried to give people not only the communication skills they needed to be able to talk about the contract, but also we tried to make sure they could articulate the difference between Must, Shall, May and Could where it appears in the contract," said Egel. "Some of the participants did not realize how important the language is right down to those specific words."

PEF Vice President Darlene Williams was at the training in November. She felt that Egel and Kolb's goal to boost engagement was not only achieved, but it also helped to build confidence in the participants.

"If we truly want members to understand how the grievance process works, then walking them through writing a first-step grievance and showing them how it gets submitted is essential," said Vice President Williams. "This training helped members understand whether their grievances are viable, what steps they should take before filing, and when a first step is or is not appropriate. It sparked important conversations among the participants about what should happen first and where to go next."

Williams believes that November's training is a strong foundation for PEF to build on and refine in order to create a complete package that new and existing stewards can refer to and use on the job. She also believes a stronger first-step grievance writing section would be a benefit to participants and, with proper samples brought back from the training, a benefit to members at their worksites.

"Overall, the training was excellent. The activities, examples, movement and interaction the presenters used kept the room energized," said Williams. "The real sign of success was when participants returned from a very nice lunch still eager to learn, still participating, and still fully committed."

Feedback following the training backs up Williams' review. Out of about 20 Stewards, 19 strongly approved of the training in exit surveys. Many cited that they wanted more coverage of the contract and a deeper understanding of Articles. Others felt that they walked away with an understanding of what it means to be a PEF Steward.

Kolb was happy to receive the feedback and has already begun refining the training. He thinks that PEF staff should receive the training as well.

"I think staff would have greater insight and input into the training," said Kolb. "It would help us expand the training to other regions and update the trainings for the new PEF leaders we've had over the past few years."

Egel hopes that this is a great start for members to get involved further and looks forward to hearing from the new Stewards as they put the training to good use at their agencies.

"I was so impressed with everyone's engagement, responses and thoughtfulness that I told them I could not wait to see the first grievances they write," said Egel. "I think this training was very helpful for members. If the foundation of the union is the contract and we're not clear on what is in it or what it means, then Stewards have a harder time interpreting the articles. Training like this can really help change that."



Blast from the Past: PEF members say, ‘Give Us a Fair Contract Now!’

By NAJEE WALKER

With PEF’s 2023-2026 PS&T contract ending April 1, 2026, the Contract Committee is gearing up for negotiations at a time when uncertainty seems rampant at every level of government.

At the start of the current millennium, the 1999 PEF Contract had long expired, and members had spent hundreds of days working without a new contract. So on January 5, 2000 — the 279th day without a new contract — they decided to make some noise.

PEF organized a protest of 20,000 members to rally in Albany, hoping to attract the attention of then-Governor George Pataki. Members of PEF were joined in solidarity by thousands of members from CSEA. In response, the governor mobilized 300 troopers to the State Capitol.

“Our members refused to be intimidated by an army of state and local police who were clearly under orders to try to muzzle us,” said then-PEF President Roger Benson. “Our members came to personally deliver their own message to the governor — ‘Give us a Fair Contract Now!’ — while he was presenting his State of the State address at the Capitol.”

In standing up to the Governor and making their case in the media, PEF eventually came to terms on a strong retroactive contract that governed union members’ terms and conditions of employment through 2003.

Union members tell Gov.: "WE'VE got the power!"

20,000 brave massive police presence to demand fair contract

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

It was still dark and very cold when thousands of members of PEF and the Civil Service Employees Federation climbed aboard buses all over the state early on the morning of January 5 for the ride to Albany to protest their lack of a contract.

The state employees came to bring a

lawful but loud protest to the

governor as he delivered his State of the State address to lawmakers in the Capitol.

They found a frigid welcome — a sub-zero windchill and state troopers and city police everywhere — from the moment they stepped off the 200-plus buses at Albany's Pepsi Arena until they struggled back on them again hours later.

The protestors brought their message of indignation and their demand for contract justice and a strong, warm spirit of determination that fought off the chill and would not be silenced.

NY State of siege

The governor had brought more than 300 troopers in from throughout the state to form a cordon around the Capitol and keep the protestors at a distance. It was a shock for the peaceful state workers to find barriers of steel, plastic fencing and long grey lines of troopers with billy clubs blocking their approach to the Capitol.

In fact, the governor's office did everything it could to thwart and belittle the contract protest.

Psychological warfare

A spokesman for the governor was quoted in the press a few days before the rally, alleging the protest was just a "political rally" for union leaders.

When this ploy failed to discourage

(Continued on Page 7)



MESSENGERS MASS — Thousands of PEF members and other state workers flooded the north side of the Empire State Plaza in Albany, across the street from the state Capitol, to demand a fair contract.

— Photo by Will Waldron

(Inset) Police on horseback join hundreds of other law-enforcement officers at the Capitol to keep union protestors at bay.

— Photo by Sue Cummings

Members tell governor: We want our fair share

Demand for fair contra

UNITED — Presidents Danny Donahue of CSEA, Denis Hughes of NYS AFL-CIO and Roger Benson of PEF clasp hands in solidarity. — Photo by J. Putrock, photo below by C. Brescia



By SHERRY HALBROOK and DENYCE DUNCAN LACY

A sea of yellow and red swept over the capitol on January 5, as some 20,000 members of PEF and CSEA donned their unions' colors and raised their voices to a roar in demanding a fair contract.

But instead of meeting the governor, they came nose-to-nose and knee-to-knee with a hard grey line of police, billy clubs and iron barricades.

Freedom of speech and assembly were challenged, cramped and compromised, but they prevailed, nevertheless.

"Our members refused to be intimidated by an army of state and local police who were clearly under orders to try to muzzle us," said PEF President Roger Benson.

"Our members came to personally deliver their own message — 'Give us a fair contract now!' — to the governor while he was presenting his State of the State address at the Capitol," Benson added.

Rocking the arena

More than 200 buses from throughout the state slowly delivered 13,000 irate state employees to Albany's Pepsi Arena. There they joined 7,000 more state workers, mainly from the Capital District, to hear speakers

and watch video tapes of their 10-month struggle for contract justice.



MORE MONEY — Member has her own message for Pataki.

— Photo by Joe Putrock

The members of PEF and the Civil Service Employees Association along with delegations of members from trade unions and other well-wishers from around the state cheered state AFL-CIO President Denis Hughes and the leaders and members of PEF and CSEA who addressed them.

"We're here today because George Pataki doesn't believe the PEF and CSEA contract teams speak for members," PEF President Roger Benson told the packed arena. "The governor has said that our teams are 'unreasonable' and that the workers would accept his 'very fair contract offer' if just given the chance."

"PEF and CSEA workers, this is your chance! This is your chance to speak directly to George Pataki. And we believe he can hear us today."

"What do the workers say about the current contract offer?" Benson asked the protestors.

"Get real! No deal!" was the thunderous response.

No 'whipping boys' here

Denis Hughes pledged: "All the labor



unions in this state recognize this fight and will be with you until you get a fair contract."

PEF Region 8 Coordinator Jeff Satz told the workers they held the key to making the governor respect them and the rights of labor.

"We are not going to be the whipping boy of political mismanagement,"

Satz vowed.

PEF Vice President Jean DeBow said the governor and legislators need to understand their livelihoods are at stake too.

No way to win votes

"We want our fair share now," she said. "We don't just work for the state, we vote in this state. And we'll remember on Election Day. Gov. Pataki, show us the money!"

PEF members

Michelle Burchett, a deafness counselor with a caseload of 300 hearing-impaired New Yorkers in the Bronx, and Jim Frye, a nurse at the SUNY's University Hospital in Syracuse, also addressed the crowd, telling how understaffing is eroding the public services they provide and how difficult it is to get by on their state pay.

"The governor's raise was more than my yearly salary," Burchett said. "I live and work in the Bronx and I am unable to pay my bills and eat. This is no joke."

"I came from North Dakota to New York, thinking I would get a fair shake. But where is my fair shake?" she demanded. "I give 150 percent and all I expect is to receive 100 percent back. I call the governor every day, but he never answers me."

Frye said state pay for nurses is so low and working conditions so demanding that recruitment and retention are chronic, serious problems at University Hospital where patients and staff alike suffer from the effects of understaffing.

Fair raises for all state workers would be a good start on fixing these problems, he said.

Into the fray with whistles

Wearing bright yellow-and blue-knitted



BURCHETT

Photo by S. Halbrook



FRYE

Photo by S. Halbrook

(Continued on Page 6)

Police sweeps over Capitol

CONTROL — At right, NYS Police keep tight rein on demonstrators armed with whistles and signs.

— Photo by W. Waldron

SCRAMBLE — Below, police rush to block hole in plastic fence.

— Photo by C. Brescia

PEF SPIRIT

— At right, members follow President Roger Benson to the Capitol. Below, members sport their "warpaint."

— Photos by O. Schindemi



UNDAUNTED — The sight of police, even in full riot gear, could not curb the determination of members bent on delivering a message to the governor.

— Photos by J. Triebwasser, J. Epting and R. Scales





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My first SOMOS, 25 years in the making

By JOE COCCI, PEF Director of Membership Information Systems

As I start my 25th year at PEF, spanning eight administrations and four presidents, I was invited by President Wayne Spence to attend the SOMOS conference for the first time. It was eye-opening in the best way.

The days started early and were long.

From the moment I arrived, it was clear SOMOS isn't just another conference. The halls were alive with energy — elected officials, labor leaders, and community advocates participating in presentations, panel discussions, and face-to-face conversations, all focused on making a difference. For PEF, having a seat at the table matters — and we don't get that seat without showing up.

One of the standout moments for me was a workshop called *"Empowering People in an AI World: Education, Equity, and the Future of Work."* President Spence participated in a panel discussion with State Senators Julia Salazar and Kristen Gonzalez and Assemblymember Alex Bores about how artificial intelligence is reshaping jobs and education — and how labor must have a voice in that transformation.

The Day of Service that has become a tradition of SOMOS wasn't a photo op; it was about giving back to a community that's too often denied opportunity and hope. This year, the PEF team visited Escuela Elemental Dr. Julio J. Henna, a local elementary school in San Juan. We rolled up our sleeves



Joe Cocci, front right, attends the annual Labor Breakfast with the PEF delegation on the final morning of SOMOS, Nov. 8, 2025.

alongside other union members to clean, paint, and help revitalize the school grounds. Together, we planted flowers and trees and built new swings.

The entire experience reminded me why showing up as a union matters — having a seat at the table starts with being in the room. I'm grateful to President Spence for giving me the opportunity to attend SOMOS and represent PEF at such a meaningful event.



2025 PEF Convention delegates from Division 357 (Office of Information Technology Services) pose for a group photo at the Olympic Center in Lake Placid.

ITS delegates share value of PEF Convention

First-time delegate Dana Blair, a project manager with the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany, and PEF Division 357 Secretary Heather Craven, a manager of information technology services with ITS in Albany, recently reflected on their experiences at the 47th annual PEF Convention in the PEF Division 357 newsletter. We've reprinted their words here with permission.

From Skeptic to Supporter: My First PEF Convention Showed Me the Real Power of Our Union!

By DANA BLAIR

I arrived at the PEF Convention in Lake Placid on October 19 expecting nothing more than a dull union meeting in a beautiful location. Like many, my view of PEF was limited to personal needs: routine advice, crisis intervention, and the occasional holiday party or picnic. I was wrong! The entire event was incredibly well planned and organized, designed specifically for the 700 delegates who were there to shape the union's path forward. My opinion wasn't just changed; it was fundamentally transformed.

My week began with a crucial, eye-opening session — a crash course in Parliamentary Procedure (Robert's Rules of Order). This instruction was key, teaching me the essential rules for fair debate and voting. But the real power was evident during the

review of resolutions. I learned that any PEF member with an idea can submit one. A resolution is the delegates' mechanism to request work from the PEF leadership, effectively putting the members directly in charge of the year's agenda if their resolution gets adopted. I was unprepared for the deep sense of empowerment that came with this realization.

Once a resolution makes it to the Convention floor, delegates debate and vote on it. If passed, it becomes assigned work for our PEF leadership for the coming year. This collective power delivered immediate, tangible results: Securing added protections against violence for our Mental Health Unit (MHU) staff in high-risk facilities. Successfully fighting to save SUNY Downstate hospital from closure or conversion.

This is the real work of our union: enforcing our contract rights, protecting our pensions, and fighting legislatively for our professions. Beyond the serious work, the delegates also showed their generosity, raising more than \$11,000 for a breast cancer charity. That shows the full scope of what we — PEF members — can truly do together.

My biggest lesson is this: PEF is not a last resort — it's a powerful force for change, and that power starts with you. I truly urge every member to attend at least one Convention. Don't just watch PEF work — come join us, get your voice heard, enjoy the after-hours fun with your PEF family from all over the state, which was amazing, and start driving the change!

A wide variety of PEF Committees

By HEATHER CRAVEN

At Convention we get to hear from and participate in various PEF committees. Before going to my first Convention many years ago, I didn't even realize many of these committees existed.

Each year I attend I learn about different committees or more about the various committees. These special interest committees are available for any member to join throughout the year! PEF has the following committees that would welcome your participation and are available to assist you:

- Caribbean-American Committee
- Hispanic Committee
- Indo-American Committee
- Jewish Committee
- Pride Committee
- Veterans Committee
- Statewide Women's Committee

Many of these committees are open to anyone. For example, you don't need to be Hispanic to join the Hispanic Committee. If you have an interest in learning more about one of these committees, please reach out to PEF Headquarters (518-785-1900) and they can provide contact information for the committee chair.

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New + Existing PEF Members

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PEF member collects donations for Hurricane Melissa relief in Jamaica

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Hurricane Melissa devastated Jamaica late last month. Current damage estimates show the Category 5 storm caused as much as \$7 billion in damages. International aid organizations have descended on the island nation with relief supplies, and the United States has pledged \$12 million in assistance.

But when a disaster like Hurricane Melissa hits, governments do not commonly donate essentials like food and drinking water, meaning it often falls to organizations and individuals — such as PEF member Michelle Campbell — to help feed those affected by the hurricane.

“This is something I wanted to do personally,” said Campbell, who is a Healthcare Management Systems Analyst with the New York State Department of Health. “Jamaica is my homeland, and the people are near and dear to my heart. I know they’re hungry. I know firsthand that they need the food.”

Campbell is Jamaican-American and her family and friends were impacted by the storm. While they work to rebuild, she wanted to do something for as many people on the island as possible.

With her own money, Campbell bought enough food and supplies to fit into a 170-gallon container to ship to Jamaica. She recognized that her own efforts would not be enough and recorded multiple social media videos asking others to join her cause.

“This is a focus on the community. I want all my friends and associates to see if they can put in a little right now,” said Campbell in one of her first videos. “Let’s see if together we can get something substantial to feed a community.”

Since her first call to action and since that first container was shipped, Campbell has received donations from co-workers and friends moved by her goodwill. A few fellow PEF members donated items like water, flour, and rice. Others at the Department of Health donated money, which she uses to shop for fresh food.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg. We know that people are generous and we’re blessed, and right now we have a country in need,” said Campbell. “I think that this should be our standard reaction (in times of crisis). People are hurting. I am hoping that at least once monthly I can ship out that 170-gallon container.”

Campbell is collecting food, towels, laundry detergent, soap, toilet paper, and most importantly: bottled water.

“I would love to have a whole pallet of water. Right now we have four cases of water,” said Campbell. “I am not going to ship four cases of water. We need a pallet.”

Campbell said she is serious about helping the entire community. Her goal is to help feed at least 200 families.

PEF members who wish to help Campbell by contributing a monetary donation can do so through her CashApp: \$MichelleJoyC or via PayPal using the email amsotnas@gmail.com (Michelle Santos).

She also set up an Amazon.com registry where members can order needed items that will be shipped directly to Campbell’s home and then on to Jamaica every time she fills her 170-gallon bin.





RAISE Act will protect New Yorkers from unchecked AI

The following op-ed ran in The Buffalo News on Nov. 14, 2025, co-authored by PEF President Wayne Spence and Assemblymember Alex Bores:

Keeping the public protected and healthy is the basic function of any public employee, which is why New York needs to stay focused on making sure that new technologies, artificial intelligence in particular, are developed for the public good.

Since the emergence of ChatGPT in 2022, AI has become ubiquitous in the public and private spheres. The benefits – from helping to cure diseases to helping government employees complete tasks – are clear. But if left unchecked, AI also creates new risks that no one should have to shoulder.

That’s why we support the Responsible AI Safety and Education (RAISE) Act. This legislation would set commonsense rules for the most powerful AI systems, ensuring that innovation in New York happens responsibly and with the public’s safety front and center.

AI is already capable of causing real harm. Leading labs have released models that can assist in the development of biohazards and viruses. In experimental settings, AI systems often threaten engineers and lab employees to avoid being shut down.

The RAISE Act offers a straightforward solution. It requires companies developing the most advanced AI systems to follow clear safety protocols, report problems quickly and give state officials the information they need to act if things go wrong.

Some say that regulation slows progress. We disagree. Rules like these make progress possible. Think of basic building codes: They don’t stop construction — they make sure what we build is safe. The RAISE Act is to AI what asbestos and lead inspections are to construction: A basic safeguard that few could criticize in good faith.

We entered public service to help people, and the potential of catastrophic harm to the public undermines that duty. Technology should serve people, not the other way around.

We’ve seen what happens when government acts too late to regulate emerging technologies. From financial markets to data privacy to social media, failing to put up guardrails early leaves ordinary people paying the price.

New Yorkers deserve to benefit from the promise of AI without being exposed to its worst risks. By signing the RAISE Act, Gov. Kathy Hochul can chart a path that other states will follow.

Assemblymember Alex Bores, 73rd District, is co-sponsor of the RAISE Act.

PEF members put street medic training to good use

By **NAJEE WALKER**

When PEF members Myron Getman and Michael Popowich decided to go bowling together one recent evening with friends and family, neither one of them expected that they would be faced with a life-or-death situation. Thankfully, both members were prepared to act thanks in part to training offered by PEF and AFT.

Getman and Popowich, who work as research scientists at the Department of Health in Albany, bowl regularly with family and friends. On a night when most of their local alleys were booked with league games, they made their way to Green Island Bowling Alley.

"There was just one older man and the guy running the place when we got there, so we got settled in, picked up our bowling balls and started our game," said Getman. "But then Sara, Mike's wife, told us that a man had fallen and when we turned around, I could tell that he didn't just trip. He was face down."

Getman recalls feeling like he went on autopilot. After calling for someone to dial 911, Getman and Popowich began to administer CPR.

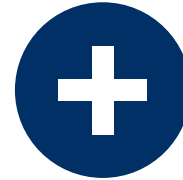
"I had taken a CPR course some time ago, so I knew how to react," said Popowich. "But Myron really helped me by making sure my compressions were on time and taking charge of the situation."

Getman and Popowich took turns administering CPR and when they realized the man was coming to, they placed him in "recovery position"—a first aid technique where a person who is unresponsive or having trouble breathing is placed in a position with their head tilted back to keep their airway open—and cleared the way for EMS to handle the rest.

Getman learned the techniques at training offered by PEF and AFT that teaches union activists how to be "street medics." The daylong workshop, called "Direct Action, Direct Care," was pioneered by AFT's Health and Safety team with the idea of protecting union members who participate in collective actions, like protests. The training covers the Good Samaritan law, common adult first aid, assessment and triage, as well as teamwork and scene safety.

PEF Health and Safety Specialist Michael Marquez conducts the training across New York State with AFT's Keith Wrightson.

"The course is being offered to local AFT affiliates, including PEF, to build capacity and increase membership involvement in rallies, marches and protests that are occurring nationwide," said Marquez. "PEF members may encounter medical emergencies at home or at work. The lifesaving skills that are taught during the class can be applied to a variety of situations and may be used to help a coworker, family member or friend."



Direct Action, Direct Care: A Street Medic Workshop

So far, PEF and AFT have partnered to bring the training to members in Regions 3, 8, 10 and 11. Additional sessions are planned.

"I did the training as part of my OSHA-30," said Getman, referring to a certification course offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. "It goes over all the usual things most people know, like how to handle heat strokes, but it also goes over how to treat puncture wounds, how to carry people out on stretchers, setting splints, how to treat people when they're affected by tear gas and other first aid."

Getman took the course about a week before the incident at the bowling alley.

Both Popowich and Getman felt the stress of the situation but were relieved that they were able to act quickly.

"I had my son with me, so I am sure there was a bit of stress added to his day," said Popowich. "But I think we helped keep things from getting worse."

The last Popowich and Getman heard, the patient they helped stabilize was recovering at a hospital. They both agree that the street medic training offered by PEF and AFT should be taken by as many people as possible.

"In a situation like this, even if you are not the one administering CPR, you can still assist," said Getman. "I think we saved his life. How can you downplay the capacity of being able to do that? Solidarity doesn't end at the shop floor."

PEF members who would like to take "Direct Action, Direct Care" training should contact their Regional Coordinator.



Leave Donation Program offers hope to members in need

By KATE STICKLES

PEF members experiencing long-term illness or injury often find themselves facing extreme financial hardship and economic loss when they exhaust their accruals before they can return to work.

That's when the value of union membership shines.

PEF and the state negotiated the Leave Donation/Exchange Program as a way to assist members in need by allowing their colleagues, other members of the bargaining unit, and M/C staff with excess leave accruals to donate them. Donations are made from annual leave, and donors must retain at least 10 days of annual leave after donating.

To be eligible for donations, members must be absent due to a non-occupational personal illness or disability; have exhausted all leave credits; are expected to be absent for at least two biweekly payroll periods following exhaustion of leave credits or sick leave at half pay; and must not have had any disciplinary actions or unsatisfactory performance evaluations within their last three years of state employment.

If you aren't sure if you are eligible, contact your Human Resources department for guidance.

Members interested in donating are encouraged to view the list of eligible recipients who have contacted PEF and asked to be listed, located here: www.pef.org/leave-donations. If you or a coworker are eligible and want to be listed, please contact PEF at communicator@pef.org. The MOA concerning the program can be reviewed in the [2023-2026 PEF/State Agreement](#).



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Analyzing the state's fiscal outlook and sharing useful resources for elder services

By JIM CARR – President, PEF Statewide Retirees

I want to wish all my union siblings and fellow retirees a wonderful holiday season! This is a special time to enjoy all the blessings in our lives – blessings of family and friendship and being part of a union that works hard for its members. This is a time to look forward to 2026 with an open mind and hope for a better year for all of us, full of good health and prosperity.

I have included information in this issue from a recent Monday Alert from our friends at the Alliance for Retired Americans and I hope it helps you understand what lies ahead. I have also included information from the Office for the Aging, a wonderful resource for seniors.

Fiscal Policy Institute NYS Mid-Year Budget Analysis

From the Alliance for Retired Americans

New York State's Division of the Budget (DOB) recently published its mid-year budget update, which forecasts considerable budget gaps in the years ahead: an apparently staggering \$26.8 billion gap over the next four years before even accounting for the impending losses of federal funding under the so-called "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (OBBBA).

At first glance, this seems like an insurmountable challenge. If the state is facing dramatic deficits before it loses federal funding, then a statewide fiscal crisis must be around the corner. As our report shows, however, the DOB's forecasted budget gaps are products of excessively conservative revenue forecasting, rather than an

underlying imbalance between revenue and spending. In fact, barring a recession, the state's budget – before accounting for the OBBBA impacts – is likely to generate surpluses over the next four years.

The DOB forecasts overestimate the risk of revenue shortfalls but also underestimate the OBBBA impacts, thereby minimizing their impact on the state budget. The Fiscal Policy Institute estimates that cumulative funding cuts under the OBBBA will be \$5.6 billion in the next fiscal year, FY 2027, and \$14.3 billion by 2030. These cuts broadly reflect the decision of the current Congress and President to eliminate health care coverage for many low-and middle-income families in order to fund tax cuts for the well off. The bill is especially generous to those earning more than \$1 million each year. In New York, these taxpayers stand to save a collective \$12 billion annually on their federal taxes.

Our report explains why the state's fiscal position is considerably stronger than the DOB forecasts indicate and, at the same time, why the OBBBA's impacts are more severe than the state is accounting for. It also demonstrates the continuing strength of the state's tax base and fiscal reserves, and that the fiscal challenges ahead can be managed through raising new revenue to the extent necessary.

NY Connects offers variety of support

From the NYS Office for the Aging

NY Connects is a trusted place to go for free, objective information and assistance on long-term services and supports (LTSS) in New York state for individuals of all ages and abilities, regardless of income or payer source.

The program is established by the state Office for the Aging in partnership with the state Department of Health and is administered by the local Office for the Aging centers and Independent Living Centers (ILCs), in partnership with county Department of Social Services offices.

Core functions include:

- Information and Assistance: Preliminary and functional screening process to assist individuals in identifying options and access to LTSS; coordination of applications for public health benefits and other services, including Medicaid; guidance and linkage to functional and financial eligibility determination processes; and cross-systems coordination to help individuals access Medicaid and non-Medicaid services
- Person-center options counseling
- Outreach and public education activities for individuals of all ages and abilities in need of LTSS
- Facilitation of local Long-Term Care Councils

Individuals can access NY Connects in person at local NY Connects offices, in the home, or in the community; by phone at 1-800-342-9871; or online at <https://nyconnects.ny.gov>.

The following are signs that an elderly person may need assistance:

- Change in eating habits
- Neglecting personal hygiene
- Neglecting housework
- Inappropriate behavior
- Change in relationship patterns
- Burns or injury marks
- Decreased participation in activities once important to them



Letter to the Editor

Responding to Comptroller's statements on Israeli bonds, pension fund

To the Editor:

I'd like to take this opportunity to respond to the recently published Communicator article on Comptroller DiNapoli's panel discussion at our 2025 Convention where members were not invited to participate. Specifically, this is in response to the brief section titled, "Israeli bonds tied to pensions."

In the discussion, the moderator mentioned, "questions from Convention delegates regarding how their pensions invest in Israeli bonds," however, it's unclear what these questions were since none were articulated or cited by the moderator or panelists. Instead, there was the imminent possibility that our Resolution #10 – well researched, heavily annotated, and reported out of Committee with no substantive changes the day before – might actually be discussed and debated on the Convention floor.

If adopted by the delegates, it would have required the panel moderator, President Wayne Spence, on behalf of PEF, to endorse the statewide Break the Bonds Campaign by writing a letter to demand the Comptroller divest our pension fund of Israeli bonds and publishing it in this periodical.

The new and renewing purchase of these bonds by the Comptroller helps give Israel unrestricted access to over \$367 million to purchase weapons to continue the ongoing genocidal slaughter of over 65,000 Palestinians begun over two years ago. Co-sponsored by 22 other PEF members and delegates and submitted months before the Convention, the resolution – like the nationwide polls indicating increasing numbers of Americans opposing the use of U.S. funds to finance Israel's genocide – and the spirit of it, is continuing to build momentum.

The article also discusses DiNapoli's rationale for ignoring how the funds are used and instead focusing solely on the rate of return: "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."

The argument is deeply misleading of course, especially when you consider DiNapoli's actual track record regarding his efforts to fulfill fiduciary obligations and in terms of not "let[ing] my opinions ... or political agendas, drive the pension." The facts speak differently. In fact, three separate Ethics violations have been filed recently with the State Ethics Commission against the Comptroller.

One complaint deals with him purchasing additional Israeli bonds in the immediate aftermath of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and voicing support for Israel as one of America's strongest allies in the Middle East (this was reported in his own press release). In a second complaint, it's alleged that he has been charged with disclosing confidential information, in secret, with a private corporation that brokers the Israel bond sales. Additionally, he's accused of refusing to comply with subsequent FOIL requests for the information even though the New York State Committee on Open Government clearly affirms that the Office of the State Comptroller and the State Comptroller himself are required to do so by law.

Regarding DiNapoli's statement that he invests in the bonds and not the state issuing them: You don't have to have an MBA in finance to understand that, as a matter of course, if you invest in these types of sovereign bonds, which are backed by the Government of Israel, you're investing in Israel. Who does he think uses the pension monies accrued from the purchase of them? If he wants to argue that investments in these bonds undertaken during his tenure as Comptroller are simply an extension of an historical investment trend, that's one thing. It's another to pretend that the Government of Israel doesn't use the funds for its own purposes which, at this moment, includes paying for the cost of committing genocide upon the Palestinian people.

If the accumulated evidence isn't enough for PEF members to question the veracity of the Comptroller's statement that he is politically neutral when it comes to pension investments, then at least it should have led to further discussion, debate, and investigation into what our pension fund investments are supporting. Choosing ethical investments could generate a reasonable rate of return so that PEF pensioners don't have to worry about the financial viability of the fund and ensure that their monthly pension checks aren't tainted with the blood of innocent Palestinians.

The comptroller is an independent, statewide elected public official beholden to the public and pensioners to fulfill their public duties. Candidates for this statewide office could and should be expected to articulate their commitment to fulfilling the duties of the office and explain how they will do this including whether they intend to include ethics and social responsibility factors in their pension fund investment decisions. Why? Because to invest in anything that fosters death and destruction undermines our very mission as civil servants, which is: to provide high quality, critical public services to enhance the quality of life of all New Yorkers. For me and a growing number of PEF members, that's something worth investing in.

Michael Tracy-Ireland, Steward, Division 357

Co-signers: Naomi Gewirtzman, PEF member, Division 168; Nazia Rahman, Secretary, Division 196; Scarlett Ahmed, Executive Board Seat 250, Division 245; Joshua Heuvel-Horwitz, Treasurer, Division 385; Joseph Sobel, PEF member, Division 281; Tor Loney, Steward, Division 194; Irshad Sumar, Steward, Division 252; Matthew Brockbank, Steward, Division 357; and Chris Rampe, Steward and Secretary, Division 168

Editor's Note: Regarding Convention Resolution 10, a motion was made during plenary session for delegates to consider Resolution 10. The delegates voted and the motion failed.



Letter to the Editor

Do Unions Fear Fascists? Why?

To the Editor:

This is in response to the letter from Randi Weingarten in the last Communicator titled: Why do Fascists Fear Unions?

If Ms. Weingarten was up on her history, she would know that no government has proclaimed itself to be fascist since World War II, which ended 80 years ago. She would also know that the fascist governments in Italy and later Germany were socialist in nature, they disbanded legislatures, were anti-smoking, pro-environmental, pro-gun-control, anti-Gypsy, anti-free speech, and antisemitic.

One of the first things the German fascists did was disband the unions, and force everyone into one big government-supported union. The fascists did not fear the unions, they disbanded them.

She goes on to state that today's "[u]nions are also unique in that they are democratic organizations ... All of the leaders are elected, including, in the case of national unions like mine, the members electing leaders of their national unions." But unions today are not unique in their democratic underpinnings, and no one would call a process "democratic" where the same people get re-elected over and over again like they do in today's unions.

Apparently, "Do Unions Fear Fascists" is also a name of a new book from Weingarten. PEF bought 700 of them and distributed them for free at the recent PEF Convention. In the book, Weingarten redefines fascism to be: "an approach to politics ... mobilizing people around fear and rage." Funny, as this seems to describe Weingarten's own approach to politics.

Nonetheless, the article goes on to not-so-subtly suggest that President Trump is a fascist. Nearly 50% of PEF members now vote Republican. Does Ms. Weingarten believe that these PEF members are fascists as well? What benefit does PEF get from promoting such a divisive and anti-Republican-PEF-member sentiment? Who profits from PEF's purchasing of this book?

Kevin E. Jones

Albany

Editor's Note: PEF purchased 700 copies of "Why Fascists Fear Teachers" by AFT President Randi Weingarten for delegates who wished to receive one at the 2025 PEF Convention, held October 19–22, 2025, in Lake Placid. President Weingarten addressed the delegation via Zoom on October 21. The total cost of the books was \$13,032.34, and the purchase was paid from the Executive Budget.



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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.



November 9, 2025

Thanks to the PEF stewards who spent their Saturday at the Region 4 office in Syracuse learning how to best advocate for their co-workers!



November 6, 2025

Members in Regions 1, 3 and 4, as well as additional folks from the Rochester Area Labor Federation, attended a Street Medic training.



November 18, 2025

Members of PEF Division 188 (NYC Children's Center) attended a membership meeting to hear from their council, VP Darlene Williams, Regional Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor, as well as PEF staff from Health & Safety, Organizing, and Membership Benefits. Thanks to every member who stopped by, engaged, asked questions, and showed what being part of a union truly means.



November 20, 2025

It was a full house at union headquarters outside Albany for Region 8 Steward Training, with more than 50 member leaders from 19 agencies learning the many roles of a PEF steward, best health and safety practices, the grievance process, discipline and discharge, organizing, and other important aspects of the PS&T contract.



December 6, 2025

PEF members in Region 5 enjoyed a Binghamton Black Bears hockey game, including a trip down to the ice to pose in front of the PEF ad the region purchased along the boards. PEF's support was obviously essential in helping Binghamton beat Port Huron, 3-1.

December 8, 2025

Holiday cheer from PEF Region 4, where members got together for the second year in a row to make holiday wreaths on Monday night.





December 4, 2025

Region 10 Coordinator Tamara Martin, along with PEF organizer Darryl Stevenson, Health & Safety Specialist Michael Marquez, and Field Rep Rosa Arenas, spent time at the Bronx DMV. They were able to engage with Administrative Law Judges and PEF members from the area.



November 24, 2025

Regional Coordinator Barbara Stransky presented the St. Nicholas Christmas Truck with PEF Region 7's annual donation.



November 23, 2025

PEF stewards spent most of their Saturday in the Region 3 office in Rochester learning how to best advocate for their co-workers!



December 10, 2025

The Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation's Southern Tier Labor Chapter presented a \$2,250 donation to the Food Bank of the Southern Tier for Labor Feeds New York, an effort spearheaded by the NYS AFL-CIO aimed at supporting the community in the face of federal budget cuts and continued economic uncertainty. The donation included support from PEF Region 2 and PEF Chapter 2 Retirees. Retirees President Jim Carr attended. Region 2 Coordinator Shelby Wisneski is a vice president of the South Tier Labor Chapter. For more information, visit <https://roclaborfed.org/southern-tier-labor-chapter> and <https://www.foodbankst.org/>.



Letters to the Editor

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

We want to hear from you!

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

