

Vol. 44

*The*  
**COMMUNICATOR**

No. 2

MARCH 2026



**WE ARE  
UNITED**

**FOR A FAIR CONTRACT!**

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## THE COMMUNICATOR

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# The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE

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## Momentum this Spring

As communities across New York State emerge from one of the harshest winters in recent memory, March 20 – the first day of Spring – reminds us that renewal and progress are always possible.

This year, that renewal is already taking shape.

On March 8, more than 15,000 union members from Long Island to Buffalo filled the streets of Albany for [a massive Fix Tier 6 rally](#). PEF members sent a clear message to lawmakers and the Governor: the current pension system does not treat all state workers fairly, and it must be fixed. Our members made their voices heard, and that momentum is driving the conversation in Albany.

At the same time, [contract negotiations are underway](#), led by PEF Chief Negotiator Mark Richard and VP and Contract Chair Darlene Williams. Our objective is clear – secure across-the-board raises and improvements that recognize the essential work PEF members perform every day, and ensure that our members can support their families as costs continue to rise.

The State Budget is entering its final weeks of negotiation, and PEF members across the state are continuing [to advocate for our priorities](#). Through direct outreach, letter-writing, and engagement with lawmakers, our members are helping push the issues that matter most to working families.

We also continue to stand with our member who was the victim of recent violence at Lakeview Shock Incarceration Facility. The [open letter](#) written to the incarcerated individual responsible for the attack—and to DOCCS management—demonstrates tremendous courage. No worker should face violence on the job. PEF will continue advocating for the changes needed to strengthen safety protections and prevent incidents like this from happening again.

As you read the stories in this March issue of The Communicator, I hope you see what I see: a union that is active, engaged, and moving forward together.

The challenges ahead are real, but so is the strength of PEF members across New York State.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence  
PEF President



# Member turnout high for first leg of Contract Tour

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

Members of PEF's Contract Team, led by Vice President and Contract Chair Darlene Williams, traveled throughout Regions 10, 11, and 12 from February 23 to March 5.

Following the first two bargaining sessions in February, the stops at New York City-area agencies where PEF members work gave members a chance to hear directly from the negotiating team and give feedback as negotiations continue this month.

PEF began asking for dates to begin negotiations in September 2025, but Gov. Kathy Hochul's Office of Employee Relations (OER) stated they were not ready to come to the table. Despite PEF's eagerness to begin, two requests for dates went without confirmation until President Spence sought to use the law to force the state to begin negotiations.

"After they said no to us, President Spence was very adamant that OER should be coming to the table as soon as possible, regardless of what they said about not being ready," said VP Williams. "We believed that they should have been ready for us and for all the other unions that they will be negotiating with."

During the contract tour, hundreds of PEF members spoke earnestly about their insecurities. As costs increase across New York State, members are focused on their ability to afford to live where they work. Members cited wages, healthcare costs, safety and staffing among their major concerns.

Unlike in past years, the PEF contract team presented 24 proposals to the governor's team during the February 2 and 18 meetings. VP Williams said the team was ready to put the proposals forward immediately, thanks largely to the decision to keep the same contract team from the 2023-2026 negotiations.

"While we cannot go into specifics on each proposal, the surveys we got back from members were very clear," she said. "One of the biggest things we're pushing for is an increase in across-the-board raises higher than 3%. The reality of our lives demands that we try for a larger increase."

Among PEF's proposals are changes to address bullying, increase the Higher Education Differential and make it permanent, expand time off for bereavement, modify the dental

plan, expand hazardous duty pay for titles that work in or around dangerous areas, and more.

Members expressed curiosity, excitement, and gratitude about the next round of contract negotiations.

“Thank you for coming out guns blazing for the very first time in my state history with all of the articles, not piecemealing them,” said Albert Jacobs III, who is the Director of the Systemic Investigations Unit at the Division of Human Rights in the Bronx. “The last contract and the way you’re handling this, I am proud to be a PEF member, and I am very pleased with each and every one of you.”

Jacobs manages a team of six investigators. He said that his team of Grade 19 state employees cannot afford to live where they work, and the threat of them potentially leaving state service is real and daunting.

“All of them are struggling and come to me as a fellow PEF member telling me that they can’t afford to be in this unit,” said Jacobs. “I need them to help me with this fight because I can’t fight discrimination in all 62 counties.”

VP Williams assured Jacobs, and members like him, that as the contract team continues to advocate on their behalf, stories like his should—and will be—heard as the fight for a fair contract continues.

At several psychiatric center stops in Manhattan, the Bronx, Long Island, and Staten Island, hundreds of members expressed their hopes for much-needed wage increases and safety at work and asked questions about what monetary benefits will still pay out even after the expiration of the current contract on April 2, 2026. ([Read answers to our FAQ here.](#))

“A fair contract means to me that I have a safe job, and I can safely perform my duties as a nurse throughout my day,” said Inessa Shteynman, a nurse at South Beach Psychiatric Center, where nearly 100 members stopped by over the course of a five-hour visit on March 3. “That I’m able to live in affordable areas and be able to provide for my family and my kids.”

At the New York City PEF Office, Kimberly Willis from the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) was excited to hear that PEF put forth so many proposals and had hit the ground running. Her hopes for a fair contract echo others in the Region.

“A fair contract means living wages,” she said. “Security for civil servants. Equality in salary. Location pay that is fair. A fair contract means protection against workplace bullies.”

The contract tour continues in Region 9 (Westchester & the Hudson Valley) this month, then will expand to Region 1 (Western New York) and other Regions this Spring. [Bookmark this page](#) for the latest dates or find them in the [PEF app](#).





# WE ARE UNITED

**FOR A FAIR CONTRACT!**



# Unions rally for pension reform with historic rally

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The ongoing effort to reform the New York State pension plan brought more than 15,000 members from PEF, NYSUT, AFT, UFT, IAF and dozens of other unions to Albany on March 8 for a show of solidarity. Labor leaders and the members they represent called on State legislators and Governor Kathy Hochul to change the pension system. An estimated 780,000 state employees fall under Tier 6 of the pension. For them, and their co-workers who may fall under Tiers 3 or 4, parity is important.

“I am a parole officer. I know many parole officers who are currently Tier 6,” said PEF President Wayne Spence, who told the crowd he is Tier 4. “They are doing the same job I do, they face the same challenges as those who are Tier 4 and they are not getting the same support for their pension. It’s not right.”

Tier 6 members currently pay 3 to 6 percent of their salaries into the pension system for the length of their career. Contributions grow as salaries increase. Tier 5 caps payments at 3 percent, but members must still contribute for their entire career. Members in Tier 4 contribute 3 percent of their salaries, but only for the first 10 years of their service. Additionally, Tier 6 members must work until age 63 to collect a full pension — for Tier 5 that age is 62. In Tier 4, members can collect their full pension at age 55 after working for the state for 30 years.

Union leaders like President Spence, NYSUT President Melinda Person, AFT President Randi Weingarten, NYS AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento, and others who took the stage on Sunday echoed the sentiment that enough is enough and called for a lowered pension contribution, elimination of retirement penalties, and a return to calculating pensions with 2% of salary after 20 years of service.

Reforming Tier 6 requires an act of legislation. President Spence was clear in his remarks that in this fight the power rests with unionized employees.

“Folks, we have more power than they realize, and they don’t want us to know,” said President Spence. “So don’t give up the fight!”

Previous union advocacy has resulted in incremental improvements to Tier 6. In her closing remarks at the rally, Governor Hochul championed those reforms and made a commitment to more in the future.

“You told us you were struggling to recruit nurses and teachers and other hardworking individuals, and we listened. And after years of neglect, we said we have to lead the charge and make some changes,” said Hochul. “So now, instead of taking the average of five years, we’re taking the average of your three consecutive years. We’re taking a shorter vesting period from 10 years down to five. And also, I’m fighting for a fairer pension plan because it’s essential that we continue recruiting people.”

The New York State budget is due April 1, so even though the rally is over, members can still make their voices heard by [sending letters to their legislators](#) and demanding they “Fix Tier 6!”

*Editor’s Note: The changes proposed to amend Tier 6 would also apply to Tier 5 of the pension plan.*







# Pay increases a big win for special ed assistants at School for the Deaf, School for the Blind

*Big salary win for special ed assistants at School for the Deaf, School for the Blind / Salary upgrades fought for by PEF worth thousands of dollars for some members*

After years of sustained advocacy by the Public Employees Federation, special education assistants (SEAs) at the New York State School for the Deaf and the New York State School for the Blind have won significant salary upgrades, new skill-based pay for Braille and American Sign Language proficiency, and no givebacks under a newly negotiated Memorandum of Agreement.

The agreement delivers long-overdue pay recognition for the workers who support students throughout the school day — from helping them navigate buses during arrival and dismissal to assisting in classrooms and supervising meals.

“This Memorandum of Agreement delivers real gains for our members,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “Special education assistants perform essential work every day to support students who rely on them. These salary upgrades and skill-based stipends finally recognize the value of the work they do.”

The salary upgrades are retroactive to April 1, 2025, and will place SEAs into higher salary grades based on their education and certification levels:

- Employees with a high school diploma or equivalent will move to Salary Grade 6
- Employees with a Level I or Level II Teaching Assistant certification will move to Salary Grade 7
- Employees with a Level III Teaching Assistant certification or Teaching Assistant Continuing Education certificate will move to Salary Grade 9

Employees who have already earned continuing certificates will be grandfathered into the higher salary grades.

For SEAs, these upgrades represent meaningful increases in annual salary. Based on an individual SEAs' education, certification level, and salary schedule step, almost all SEAs will see an increase in their annual salary ranging from approximately \$1,200.00 to \$7,900.00. The projected median increase will be \$5,110.00.

The agreement also establishes annual stipends for demonstrated proficiency in Braille or American Sign Language



(ASL)—specialized skills critical to supporting deaf and blind students. Stipends will range from \$500 at the novice level to \$2,500 at the superior level.

PEF members on the contract team credited strong member advocacy and sustained union pressure for advancing the agreement.

“For the past three years, our school contract teams have worked to ensure SEAs are recognized for the critical role they play in our schools,” said William Wiley, a contract team member from the School for the Deaf. “This agreement is a big step forward and long overdue.”

In the 2023–26 collective bargaining agreement, PEF secured a side letter directing the Department of Civil Service to conduct a salary study comparing SEAs with teaching assistants working at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the Office of Children and Family Services. The study confirmed that SEAs at the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind were underpaid.

After the study was completed in 2025, PEF pushed the State Education Department to act on the findings, leading to the salary upgrades included in the new agreement.

“It was an honor to serve on the contract team that helped secure this agreement,” said Theresa Ash, who represented members at the School for the Blind. “These state employees

show up every day to support students and their families. It is a great achievement to see their compensation elevated to match their dedication to their profession. I want to thank everyone who advocated for the MOA and for the collaboration that occurred during the negotiation process.”

The New York State School for the Deaf in Rome provides residential and educational services for students who are deaf

or hard of hearing from infancy through age 21. The New York State School for the Blind in Batavia provides day and residential programming designed to help students build independence and reach their highest potential.



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# Triangle Shirtwaist Fire: A lasting testament to the importance of workplace safety regulations

By **KATE STICKLES**

New York City, 1911. A devastating fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory on the top floors of the Asch Building in Manhattan claimed the lives of 146 workers and forever changed how we look at worker safety.

In the early 20th century, working conditions in factories across the country were often unsafe, unsanitary, and poorly regulated.

The shirtwaist factory was no different – with long hours in crowded rooms, few breaks and low pay. Supervisors reportedly locked doors to prevent unauthorized breaks and reduce theft.

On Saturday, March 25, as workers wrapped their shift, a fire broke out, believed to have been caused by a discarded cigarette or match igniting a fabric scrap bin, which quickly spread across a floor littered with flammable materials.

With locked doors, a rickety fire escape that buckled quickly under the weight of fleeing workers, and elevators that stopped functioning, 146 people perished by either burning or jumping to their deaths.

Many who died were women and teenagers, some as young as 14.

The tragedy spurred a massive shift in how the United States saw worker safety.

“In response to the tragedy, New York state created the Factory Investigating Commission ... led by progressive lawmakers like state Sen. Robert Wagner and Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith, conducted hearings, visited factories and gathered testimony from workers. They discovered that unsafe machinery, overcrowding, poor ventilation and inadequate emergency exits were commonplace,” according to the [OSHA \(Occupational Safety and Health Administration\) Education Center website](#).

OSHA, established in 1970, is a direct result of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory tragedy, as were more than 30 new labor laws passed in New York between 1911 and 1914, including:



- Mandatory fire drills and sprinkler systems in factories
- Improved fireproofing and building construction standards
- Laws limiting the hours and conditions under which women and children could work
- A requirement to have unlocked exits and accessible fire escapes
- Regular safety inspections and enforcement mechanisms

Labor unions took up the clarion call for robust health and safety regulations in the workplace, and the International Ladies Garment Worker Union grew in the aftermath of the fire, establishing collective bargaining rights for garment workers across the United State.

In 2002, the [Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Memorial Scholarship Fund](#) was established in memory of the fallen workers, presented to children whose parents were killed or permanently disabled on the job. The award is \$6,000 annually for the length of studies and is offered to multiple scholars each year.



### **PEF Health and Safety**

Unions continue to honor the legacy of those lost on the job through health and safety departments and contract provisions.

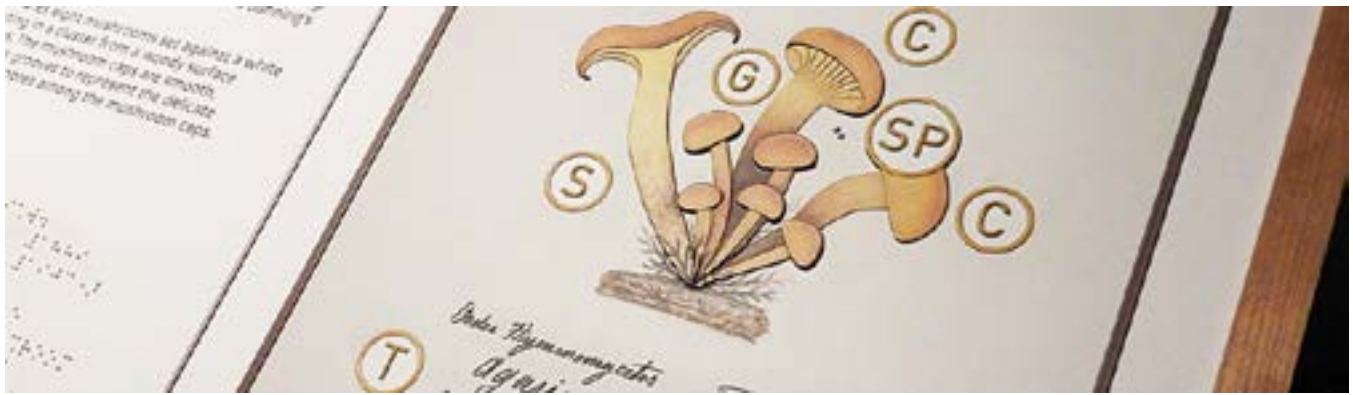
[PEF's Health and Safety Department](#) employs dedicated specialists and provides comprehensive programs, information, and technical assistance in a variety of ways, including:

- On-site training, workshops and conferences on the topics that affect members the most, such as violence in the workplace, ergonomics, workplace stress, indoor air quality, worker's compensation, chemical hazards and much more.
- Formation and support of workplace and agency joint health and safety committees.
- Technical assistance such as worksite inspections and policy review; workers' compensation assistance; PESH enforcement; fact sheets; information on standards & regulations; and "Right to Know" information.

Article 18 of the PS&T contract focuses on health and safety, as well, creating a joint PEF/NYS Article 18 Committee to study and review matters of mutual concern in areas of health and safety, serving as a forum in which PEF can advise the state of potential health or safety problems; advise on the development and implementation of state policy in all matters related to health and safety; serve as a means by which pro-active measures to improve health and safety at the worksite can be developed and implemented; and undertake initiatives in research, education and support of agency and local level health and safety committees. The committee is co-chaired by Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham and Region 9 Coordinator Gabriela Franklyn.

There are also agency-level and local-level committees, tasked with the same functions as the state-level committee. PEF's Health and Safety Department works with local leaders to establish these crucial committees and encourages workplaces without a local level committee to reach out about forming one.

For more information, contact Health and Safety at 1-800-342-4306, ext. 254, or [healthandsafety@pef.org](mailto:healthandsafety@pef.org).



# Members at State Museum make mushrooms exhibit accessible

*Tactile panels on display through April 6*

By **KATE STICKLES**

For most museum visitors, experiencing an exhibit means looking at it. But what if you are visually impaired, blind, or view the world in a different way?

PEF members at the Office of Cultural Education collaborated to bring mycologist Mary Banning's world of mushrooms to life for visitors who might not otherwise be able to enjoy it.

## A 'view' for all

Their work is part of the exhibit [Outcasts: Mary Banning's World of Mushrooms](#), where a series of tactile panels with braille text and raised elements allow visitors to feel the shapes and textures of mushrooms and experience the information in a new way. The panels complement the exhibit's vibrant prints and flowing script.

"It was pretty clear that there was no reason for someone with low vision to be at the museum, so we wanted to make sure we offered a lot of fun things to explore," said Shawn Lemieux, director of the [Talking Book and Braille Library](#). "It was an opportunity to provide accessibility for people who may not always have accessibility, especially in museums where everything is so visual."

[RELATED: PEF librarians help blind and readers with disabilities access thousands of books](#)

Lemieux, who has low vision, said museum visits can sometimes feel underwhelming.

"A lot of times when I'm at an exhibit with somebody, they're walking through it very fast because they're looking at everything – and I'm bored because I'm not looking at everything," she said.



Visitors with low vision fall across a spectrum, she explained, from those who are completely blind to those with limited sight. While Banning's paintings are somewhat accessible up close, the tactile panels provide even more meaningful interaction.

"What was really fascinating to me is that I know about script writing, but I don't see it very often. Not because it's not there, because I just don't see it. It was really neat to feel it, because on these boards you can feel what Mary Banning's script looked like, and that's important," Lemieux said.

Her handwriting is part of the story of Banning's work, Lemieux said, and the raised panels allow visitors to feel the script, the outlines of the mushrooms, and their shapes.

"If you've never had interactions with mushrooms, how would you know what one looks like if you've never seen one before?" she asked. "If you just look at a picture and you don't have three-dimensional vision, it still looks flat. But when you feel it, it's tactile — you can understand what it is."

QR codes below each painting provide additional information online, including the full text connected to each image.

"I love information, and having the option to access it is golden," Lemieux said. "I can get on my phone and read about all this neat stuff. It's really an immersive experience, and I'm so grateful to the team that did this."

The exhibit also features tactile and audio elements beyond the panels, including a wall where visitors can feel the textures of different mushrooms and listen to a calming nature soundscape.

[RELATED: PEF members travel to D.C. to advocate for museums](#)

Museum planner Koren Lazarou said the project brought together PEF members and staff from across the Office of Cultural Education, including the New York State Archives, the Museum's history department and Research and Collections, and the Talking Book and Braille Library.

"There's a lot of excitement around making accessible components and features in all of our exhibits going forward," she said. "Each exhibit is unique and kind of has a life unto itself. This one in particular had a lot of momentum. The content really allowed us to look into all the different ways that people could experience mushrooms."

While the tactile panels will be removed from the exhibit after April 5, they will remain part of the museum's teaching collection, and staff hope the project will continue the conversation around accessibility.



## The world of mycology

Curator of Mycology Patricia Kaishian said the exhibit also highlights a renewed interest in fungi and the museum's unique collection.

"There has been a surge of interest in mycology over the last few years," she said. "The museum is a great place to tell mycological stories because we have a very historic collection of fungi that even major natural history museums don't have."

The exhibit centers on Mary Banning, who was born in 1822 and developed a fascination with mushrooms, nature, and drawing early in life. Despite falling into poverty after her father's death, Banning continued her studies, exploring forests on her own.

Banning created detailed illustrations and descriptions of the specimens she found, documenting their biology and colors at a time when few professional mycologists existed.

One of those professionals was Charles Peck, the mycologist at the New York State Museum. Banning corresponded with Peck for more than 20 years and eventually sent him a manuscript she had spent three decades developing. It included 175 watercolor illustrations documenting the mushrooms of Maryland.

"She's really funny and had these very lucid, charming descriptions of people that she met in the woods, people who thought she was crazy for doing what she was doing," Kaishian said. "It's very immersive, it's very charming, but also deeply serious. She was a really talented specialist, a technical scientist, but she can also move between technical description and very vivid prose."

Tragically, the manuscript sat in a desk drawer for more than 80 years.

"My predecessor uncovered the manuscript in the 1980s and immediately recognized its value," Kaishian said. "He helped bring her legacy to life and played a role in getting her inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame."

When Kaishian joined the museum in 2023, she continued that work and sought publication for Banning's manuscript.

"I am happy to say that it's being published by Princeton University Press," she said. "I'm very excited about that. I think she deserves to be celebrated and acknowledged. I had a lot of fun putting this all together. I love that it brings together history, science, art, and the history of women in science."

# PEF members travel to D.C. for Museum Advocacy Day

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Each year, workers and advocates from museums across the nation travel to Washington, D.C., for Museum Advocacy Day. It is an annual opportunity to meet with members of Congress and their staff to push for funding and laws that help museums across the country function and thrive.

This year, PEF members Aaron Noble and Mickey Dobbin, who work at the New York State Museum in Albany, got a chance to participate.

“Museum Advocacy Day is organized by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). They connect us and other museum advocates to the various lawmakers,” said Dobbin, who is a Research Collections Technician at the NYS Museum and who serves on the PEF Executive Board Member and is the Treasurer for PEF Division 194. “They make sure that everyone attending these meetings is well equipped and knows how to talk to legislators about museum advocacy.”

Dobbin was glad that he could continue his advocacy not only for PEF and the members he represents, but also for museums as a whole.

“We had a chance to meet with the staff for (New York) Senators Gillibrand and Schumer, but we also got to meet with House Representative Paul Tonko,” said Dobbin. “Tonko is the chair of the Congressional Museum Caucus, and you could tell that he already had a basis of understanding and support, but he was also very engaged and very curious about all of our needs.”

Noble, a Senior Historian and Assistant Council Leader for Division 194, said that when it comes to museums, New York is lucky to have an advocate like Tonko.

“Paul Tonko is well acquainted with the importance of history, culture and museums,” said Noble. “We had a really positive meeting with each of the legislators and their staff, and I think we did a good job highlighting the importance of the work that our members do at the State Museum.”

Museum Advocacy Day is also about reminding the public about the importance of museums and history. According to AAM, nearly 62,000 jobs in New York are supported by the museum industry each year. Tax revenue generated by New York museums exceeds \$1 billion. In addition, AAM reports that regardless of political affiliation or persuasion, about 89% of Americans believe that museums provide important impacts to the communities.

“Museums have consistently polled as one of the most trusted institutions in American society, for decades,” said Noble. “Museums do the work of providing forensic evidence of what happened in the past. That sort of work allows us to be trusted truth tellers and provide museum visitors with evidence that



PEF members Mickey Dobbin and Aaron Noble attend conferences and meetings with legislators in Washington, D.C. for Museum Advocacy Day.

allows for conversation about our past and our story as a people and as a country.”

Museums also help develop industry beyond the education sector. Building infrastructure and workforce development are all layered into keeping museums up and running, said Dobbin.

“People interact very personally with museums every day. It takes teams of people to make sure that the exhibits are well established,” said Dobbin. “But it also takes teams of people to build and maintain museums, to figure out temperature control, and so much more. Museums support communities at nearly every level.”

Both Noble and Dobbin feel that PEF and AFT have provided great support to museum workers over the years. They’re grateful for the opportunity to discuss the needs of museums with others in their field, their fellow union members, and legislators with the backing of both unions.

“President Spence and the PEF staff have been behind us 100 percent of the time through trying times that we’ve had at the museum and through turning the page and finding solutions to those issues,” said Noble.

In last year’s State budget, \$150 million in funding was allocated to help restore Albany, including \$12 million in operating aid for the New York State Museum. PEF is supporting a budget request this year that would provide \$14 million to support the operating needs of the Cultural Education Center, including the museum.

“Now, we work hand-in-hand with leadership at the Museum and the State Education Department and are transforming it into something that people can be proud of. We’re grateful to President Spence, AFT, and all the staff for their support.”



# Museums as Economic Engines

In 2017, the American Alliance of Museums partnered with Oxford Economics to study the museum sector's significant contribution to the US economy.

Source: Oxford Economics, IMPLAN, 2017.

## \$5.37 billion

The total financial impact that museums have on the economy in New York



### 61,796 jobs

Important jobs within the state are supported by the museum industry each year.



### \$3.9b income

Museums provide substantial wages and other income to the state's residents annually.



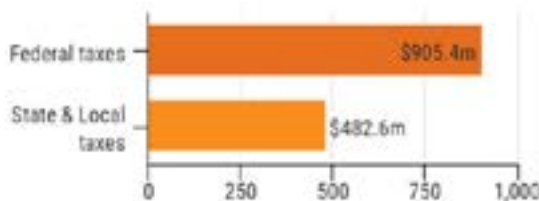
### \$1.388b taxes

Even though many museums operate as nonprofits, they generate significant tax revenues to the federal, state, and local governments.

### 89%

 Regardless of political persuasion, 89% of Americans believe that museums provide important economic impacts back to their communities.

Source: AAM's Museums & Public Opinion 2017



**American Alliance of Museums**

Download the full report at <http://aam-us.org/EconomicEngines2017>



# President's keynote address at conference reflects on legacy, hopes for the future

By **KATE STICKLES**

President Wayne Spence gave the keynote address at the 55th Annual New York State Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislators (NYSABPRHAL) Conference in Albany on Feb. 14, reflecting on the legacy of the labor movement and looking forward to building a better future.

"Legacy is often spoken of as something we inherit. But in labor, in civil rights, and in public service, legacy is something we carry," he told the assembled leaders at the annual labor luncheon the Saturday of the conference. "It is a trust handed down by people who organized when it was dangerous, who spoke when silence was safer, and who built institutions so that those coming behind them would have a fighting chance."

President Spence recognized the contributions of the late Dorothy Reid, a longtime PEF member who, at 14 years old, helped shape the future of public education as an original plaintiff in one of the five cases that would later become the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that forced public school desegregation.

"Dorothy Reid got that education she fought for; she lived her legacy, and for 28 years served the state of New York in various capacities," he said. Her daughter, Renee Reid, continues that legacy of service as a parole officer and PEF member.

## **Prison reform**

Conditions in correctional facilities across New York remain dire, with understaffing, policies driven by politics instead of evidence, exhaustion, and fear.

"We have had four suicides among PEF members working in DOCCS in two years," President Spence said. "Something is wrong. Something is broken. New York State correctional facilities are not safe for anyone, not workers and not incarcerated individuals."

Reform means safe staffing, mental health support, essential rehabilitation programming, clear protocols, and accountability, he said.

## **Health and safety**

When the state cuts corners on safety, the impact is not evenly distributed — it disproportionately falls on Black and Brown workers who are concentrated in the most dangerous public-sector jobs.

"At PEF, we have fought for enforceable protections — not promises," President Spence said. "For real workplace violence prevention, clear emergency procedures, and a voice for workers in decisions that affect their lives. Because no one should have to choose between serving the public and surviving the job."

## **Solidarity**

In Brooklyn, unions, clergy leaders and the community united to protect SUNY Downstate Medical Center — a hospital that serves a patient population that is overwhelmingly Black and Brown.

“The health equity gap in this state is real,” President Spence said. “We almost lost the only kidney transplant center in Brooklyn and the only one in any public hospital in New York City.

“Saving Downstate wasn’t just about preserving a hospital; it was about protecting vital healthcare access and equity,” he said. “That victory proves something powerful: When labor stands united, we can take on the biggest fights — and we can win.”

### A new threat

Recent ICE activity poses a direct threat not just to immigrant communities, but to labor itself.

“Fear is a union-buster,” said President Spence. “When workers are afraid to report violations, afraid to organize, afraid to show up at a meeting or a rally, that’s not public safety, that’s intimidation. Solidarity cannot be conditional, and justice cannot be rationed.

“Legacy forward does not mean nostalgia,” he concluded. “It means responsibility. I believe when labor, community, and justice move as one, tomorrow is transformed.”



# PEF Appointment Letter Bill signed by Governor, takes effect by December 2027

By **NAJEE WALKER**

In private sector employment, when a new employee is hired or promoted, they receive a letter announcing the specifics related to their appointment, including salary, benefits information, and more. While some of New York State's civil servants may have received this type of "appointment letter," many state employees never receive them or receive them late. That is because appointment letters were not mandatory, until now.

Late last year Governor Hochul signed a bill that PEF strongly advocated for that will ensure all newly hired and promoted employees receive appointment letters by December 2027.

The new law brings much needed transparency to the hiring process, says PEF Director of Civil Service Enforcement and Research (CSE/R) Veronica Foley.

"We always want to ensure that we continue our advocacy for solutions that empower prospective and existing civil servants to find meaningful work that can sustain families," said Foley. "This law is a start."

She said that CSE/R often speaks to members who have valid questions regarding their rights and status within the Civil Service system, but when pressed for details to aid in an investigation, they do not have them. CSE/R has worked with members who have not known whether they are permanent, provisional, or temporary upon appointment. In addition to listing the position type, appointment letters will include the jurisdictional class of the position, the appointment type, starting wages, probationary periods, employee benefits and the bargaining unit of the title.



Foley said this type of communication means that the state's Department of Civil Service (DCS) is one step closer to modernization, which is a goal of both PEF and DCS.

PEF members who do not know their position type, the jurisdictional class of their position or want to know more about benefits like retirement, deferred compensation or representation rights, should ask for the information from their local human resources department either upon a new appointment or now.



## William Crotty, 1951 – 2026

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Chapter 7 Retiree President William A. Crotty, 74, of Plattsburgh, passed away February 20, 2026, in Vermont.

Mr. Crotty started his state career in January 1979 as a teacher at Clinton Correctional Facility, where he worked until his retirement on Dec. 31, 2009.

He held various leadership positions and committee appointments during his career — including serving on the Clinton Correctional Facility Affirmative Action Committee, being a member of the NYSUT Committee on Human and Civil Rights, a member of the Board of Directors at NYSUT, a Vice President of AFSCME, a COPE Trustee with the Northeast Central Labor Council, a PEF Council Leader, as well as Region 7 Coordinator.

Mr. Crotty was passionate about helping PEF members, especially retirees, in his later years. He became the Chapter 7 (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, and St. Lawrence counties) Retiree President in 2010 and served in that role until his passing.

Services will be Sunday March 15 at 1 p.m. with visitations starting at 11 at the Brown Funeral Home in Plattsburgh. There will be a celebration of life and reception afterwards.



# PEF, AFT continue to distribute books at youth residential facilities

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF visited Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center in Utica on March 6, with books in hand to give to youth, ranging in age from 5 to 17, who are receiving services and residential care at the facility.

“The kids were excited to see all the different books and most found something they liked,” said Vice President Randi DiAntonio. “As public servants we like to help, and we love to find ways to make a difference in the lives of the people we serve and the communities we live in.”

[Reading Opens the World](#) is a national literacy initiative led by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in partnership with organizations like PEF, aimed at promoting reading by providing free books to children, families, educators, and the community.

Through the initiative, PEF provides high-quality books to youth in the community, as well as in facilities run by the state Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

“We just kicked off our 2026 giveaways and visited Brookwood Secure Center in Claverack where more than 100 youth stopped by the book tables,” DiAntonio said. “We are in the process of planning events at all nine Department of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth facilities.”

Over the past few years, PEF has done several events at OMH facilities, including Sagamore Children’s Psychiatric Center, New York City Children’s Center, Elmira Psychiatric Center’s children’s unit, as well as OCFS Industry Residential Center and Finger Lakes Residential Center.

At some of the locations, where the residents are also parents, PEF works with them to select books to send home to their children and help foster those relationships.

In 2023, PEF launched an annual Wellness Fair & Book Giveaway at the Washington Avenue Armory in Albany, securing 20,000 books from Reading Opens the World and coupling the giveaway with health and wellness vendors and community organizations. Families could take home up to 10 books and educators up to 40. Many arrived with totes and even wagons to cart home their treasures. (See coverage of the [2023 event](#), [2024 event](#), and [2025](#).)

“We have been involved in a variety of giveaway events,” DiAntonio said. “Our current focus is to go into facilities where our members work to share positivity and make a difference in the lives of those served. We are also looking for ways to partner with outside organizations and give back to our community and encourage reading.”

Since 2011, Reading Opens the World has distributed more than 10 million free books to students, families and educators serving in Title I schools and programs, and public employees and health care professionals serving communities in need across the country.



# Blast from the Past: Forecast for Tier 6 is now a reality

By **NAJEE WALKER**

It was almost a year into the first term of Governor Andrew Cuomo, and two years after the institution of Tier 5 in 2010, that the former governor pushed for a new tier of pension benefits. Tier 6 went into effect for anyone hired by New York State on or after April 1, 2012. It further diminished retirement benefits for state workers at a time when New York was already seeing a loss of talent at agencies across the state.

Just like Governor David Paterson before him and every governor who established a new pension tier, Cuomo cited high costs and deficits as the reason to further claw back state worker benefits.

PEF members — who had just ratified a contract that gave back \$230 million over four years in the form of no wage increases, pay delays, and higher health insurance costs — were now faced with layoffs, merging agencies, privatization and the introduction of Tier 6.

“The governor’s new Tier 6 proposal is nothing more than a false choice of accepting severely reduced pension benefits or joining an inefficient 401k-style pension system,” former PEF President Ken Brynien said at the time. “It would force public employees into a pension gamble that virtually guarantees a lower level of benefits. This proposal is similar to the misguided proposals for reforming Social Security proposed by former President George W. Bush.”

Despite PEF and other unions pushing Governor Cuomo to reconsider, he signed Tier 6 into law.

Today, about 60% of state employees (780,000) are enrolled in Tier 6. Fourteen years after its creation, Tier 6 has proven to be a failure. New York State has thousands of job openings, staffing shortages at every agency, and workers in Tier 4 and below are retiring faster than they can be replaced. In addition, younger workers can earn much more in the private sector, and Tier 6 is not enough of an incentive for them to consider public service. That’s why the calls to “Fix Tier 6” from PEF and dozens of other unions are louder than ever.

*Editor’s Note: State lawmakers and Governor Hochul are under pressure to act during this budget cycle to make meaningful reforms to Tier 6. [Please send a letter](#) to your elected representatives today!*

# Mergers, Tier 6 dominate

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

In presenting his state Executive Budget proposal for 2012-13 in January, Gov. Cuomo acknowledged the state is operating with 16,000 fewer employees than it had to do the job in 2008, and the job has grown over that time.

He stopped short of proposing to add substantially more employees.

Instead, Cuomo is looking to closings, consolidations and reorganization of agencies and programs to get the maximum work from the force he has.

Topping his list: Close Kingsboro Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn which serves the state's most populous county, and give the state commissioner of mental health a free hand to close or reduce more services as he chooses.

He also wants to reduce the notice requirement for closing or reducing mental health facilities and programs from 12 months to a maximum of 60 days.

In addition, the governor proposes to implement recommendations of the "SAGE" Commission he created last year to:

- Merge the Office of Employee Relations and the Department of Civil Service into a new Department of Workforce Management that would operate a new statewide training center;
- Merge the Division of Lottery and the Racing and Wagering Board into a new NYS Gaming Commission;
- Transfer operation and management of the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center from the Department of Environmental Conservation to the Olympic Regional Development Authority;
- Centralize "similar" agencies' finance, human resources, real estate, information technology and customer service functions into statewide centers. The state Office of General Services would provide procurement, real estate, financial and human resource services throughout state service; and
- Integrate the collection function at Higher Education Services Corp (HESC) with the state Department of Taxation and Finance.

While the governor's workforce charts don't show any HESC staff moving to Tax and Finance, the state Division of Budget says that could happen.

The governor's appropriations bills, which cannot be altered by the Legislature, would allow him to move funds between agencies.

The SAGE Commission is expected to recommend further mergers and consolidations of state agencies over the next three years.

## It takes people

"It's time for our state's elected leaders to recognize nothing gets done without workers: trained, competent, professional workers," said PEF President Ken Brynien following the budget address.

"Initiatives proposed in this budget will increase the privatization of key state services in agencies that serve youths and people with disabilities," Brynien said. "The governor has also proposed 'reforms' to the Civil Service system that will make it easier to appoint politically connected individuals by making whom you know a more important factor in hiring than what you know."

While the budget does not propose to lay off large numbers of employees at most agencies, it would leave many of them increasingly shortstaffed, which opens the door to still more wasteful reliance on costly private contractors to provide state services.

Brynien said, since the year 2000, the state Department of Transportation has lost 1,900 employees, including more than 900 engineers. The department is expected to lose another 91 employees this year including 62 engineers. Meanwhile, DOT increased its spending on consultant engineers even though they cost 50 percent to 75 percent more than the state engineers. In just the last year, DOT has

increased its spending on consultant engineers by 22 percent.

The proposed budget would add a net gain of 70 employees over all state agencies, but that slight increase is deceiving because the plan would let attrition continue to shrivel many already depleted programs and services.

The Labor Department, for instance, would lose 227 employees and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities 114.

No group of PS&T members has been forced to struggle harder in recent years than those at the state Office of Children and Family Services, and the governor singled them out for still more challenges.

He proposes to lay off 123 of them and to hire 314 others. He links this to a proposal to remove New York City youths from the agency's non-secure facilities, and to eliminate 324 beds and after-care opportunities. The new positions would strengthen mental health and direct-care services and they would staff a new 24-hour multi-agency hotline for reporting allegations of the abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

The only other state agency that would face outright layoffs under Cuomo's proposal is the Division of Human Rights, which would lose three employees.

## Tier 6: Enough already

"The governor's proposed budget ignores that state workers have done their share to address the state's fiscal problems," Brynien said.



**PEF'S RESPONSE** — PEF President Ken Brynien is interviewed by a statewide news organization on PEF's response to the State of the State address. — Photo by Darcy Wells



# 2012-13 state budget mix



**MESSAGE TO THE GOVERNOR** — PEF members attend the 22nd Annual "Peoples' State of the State" rally in Albany's Academy Park January 3. PEF President Ken Brynien was among those addressing the crowd about tax fairness and quality public services.  
— Photo by Darcy Wells

Not only is the governor not proposing to hire substantially more workers, his call for a new pension Tier 6 would make it even harder to recruit them.

Brynien said it's difficult to see how that could help ease the state's budget problems now, since it would only affect future employees and it will be years before anyone retires who was hired under the

Tier 5 that was created in 2010. Tier 5 is supposed to save the state and local governments \$35 billion over the next 30 years.

Just last fall, PEF's PS&T members reluctantly agreed to sacrifice \$230 million over four years to help the state climb out of its financial hole, by ratifying a contract that denies them raises for several years,

delays some of their pay and charges them more for health insurance.

"The governor's new Tier 6 proposal is nothing more than a false choice of accepting severely reduced pension benefits or joining an inefficient 401k-style pension system," Brynien said. "It would force public employees into a pension gamble that virtually guarantees a lower level of benefits. This proposal is similar to the misguided proposals for reforming Social Security proposed by former President George W. Bush.

"Our members earned their pensions, which are reasonable. The average annual state pension is \$19,000," Brynien said. "The current increases in pension costs don't result from increased pension benefits. They were caused by the collapse of the stock market."

Instead of always looking to state employees and their pensions and benefits to make up for budget shortfalls, the governor should focus on creating true fiscal fairness and close corporate tax loopholes, Brynien said.

"We support a different approach to budgeting. If the governor respects the professionalism of the state workforce, we can work with him to get the job done."



# Region 1 aims to reenergize Women's Committee

By **KATE STICKLES**

When Region 1 Coordinator Vinny Cicatello took the position after winning a special election in June 2025, he aspired to reinvigorate several of the Region's committees, including the Women's Committee.

The first step, he said, was finding the right leaders.

"Kayla Mootry is enthusiastic, and she is a part of the statewide committee," he said of his pick for co-chair, who works with him at Buffalo Psychiatric Center. "She is perfect for this role."

There will be a relaunch meeting at 5 p.m. on April 7 and Cicatello and Mootry hope to get a good turnout.

"We are really trying to provide a safe space, to support and empower members," Mootry said, "so people can be heard and grow in their personal, work and union lives. A lot of people don't want to put themselves out there. We want to provide a space to support them and let them be heard."

The Women's Committee welcomes any participants, not just women, Mootry emphasized.

Cicatello said the kickoff meeting is just a start. From there, they hope the committee will grow, including selection of a co-chair to work with Mootry on the revitalized committee.

Feedback will be important along the way.

"Getting dedicated people and getting member input will be essential," he said.

Reach out to Mootry with questions or to join the committee by emailing [mootry0824@yahoo.com](mailto:mootry0824@yahoo.com). RSVP to the April 7 event is required. It will be held at the Region 1 Office, 4950 Genesee St., Suite 150, Cheektowaga, N.Y. 14225.

# Honoring Caribbean-American women who championed human, labor rights

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Every March is International Women's Month and this year the PEF Caribbean-American Committee is honoring three inspiring women for their contributions to human rights, labor rights, and community and political activism.



## **Guerline Jozef**

Guerline Jozef founded the Haitian Bridge Alliance, the only Black-led, woman-led, Haitian American-led organization serving migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. She also co-founded the Black Immigrants Bail Fund and the Cameroon Advocacy Network.

Jozef's work focuses on migrants of African Descent. She is a leading human rights advocate, thought leader, and strategist who dedicates her life to bringing awareness to issues that affect us all locally and globally, such as immigration, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and other human rights issues.



## **Roxanne Brown**

Roxanne Brown was elected the first African American and first woman president of the United Steelworkers in March, leading North America's largest industrial union with a focus on diversity, worker engagement and advocacy. Brown was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and grew up in White Plains, N.Y. Union-represented jobs enabled her mom and aunt to buy houses and break into the middle class, a transformative experience that inspired her lifelong commitment to working people.



## **Claudia Jones**

Claudia Jones (1915–1964) was a Trinidad-born journalist, feminist, and communist activist who became a prominent leader in the U.S. and later the UK. She advocated for Black individuals, women, and workers in both the U.S. and England. After being deported from the U.S. due to her political activism, she founded the West Indian Gazette and launched the precursor to the Notting Hill Carnival in London, becoming a major voice against racism and imperialism.



# Stay connected to PEF on your mobile device!

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The PEF App is the place to learn everything you need to know about your union and what it's doing for you. Stay informed and get involved with your union! The App allows PEF to deliver targeted information based on your Region, Division, or Agency, ensuring you're in the know and engaged.

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Today**



# It's never too early to plan for PEF Convention!

**By KATE STICKLES**

The 48th annual PEF Convention will be held Oct. 18-21, 2026, in Niagara Falls. Delegates must be dues-paying members as of March 5, 2026, and obtain the signatures of three other dues-paying PEF members from their constituency in order to attend. Petitions for signatures can be downloaded from the [PEF Elections page](#) on March 16 and must be emailed or mailed to PEF headquarters by April 5. [Click here for complete delegate rules](#). If you're new to PEF and wondering what Convention is

all about, [here's a flyer that provides some details](#). In short – it is the highest decision-making body of PEF. Delegates hear from leaders in the labor movement, receive updates from elected officers, and set the union's agenda for the year ahead. Last year, in Lake Placid, more than 700 delegates participated, and we'd love to grow that number even more this October in Niagara Falls!



# Celebrating St. Patrick's Day across the state

By **KATE STICKLES**

**Region 3** members are invited to the annual PEF Region 3 Legislative Breakfast, from 9 to 11 a.m. March 14 at the Regional Office, 255 East Ave., Rochester.

With a new contract being negotiated and a multi-union push for more pension reform, this is a perfect time to express your thoughts and concerns to our elected representatives as both their constituents and as employees of New York State. Please click [here](#) to register so Region 3 is sure to have enough food.

Following the breakfast, the Region will participate in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, which begins promptly at 12:30 pm.

For questions, please contact Region 3 Office Assistant [Annabelle.Fritz@pef.org](mailto:Annabelle.Fritz@pef.org) or call (585) 736-9460.

**Region 5** will participate in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 7 in Binghamton.

Staging will begin at 12:30 p.m. at Mirabito Stadium parking lot, 211 Henry St., Binghamton, and the parade will step off at 1:30 p.m.

If you and your family are interested in marching, RSVP to [Scott.Hektor@pef.org](mailto:Scott.Hektor@pef.org) by February 28. Participants will get union sweatshirts.

**In Region 8**, PEF will have a table at the annual American-Irish Legislators Society St. Patrick's Dinner on March 9 at the Ancient Order of Hibernians Hall, 375 Ontario St., Albany.



## PEF in the News

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### **PEF VP provides tips for fellow unions**

One of PEF's international unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), turned to PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio for tips on mobilizing members and lobbying effectively as part of AFT's Public Employees program and policy council meeting in New York City this month. Click [here](#) to read the story from AFT.

### **Clarion call to Fix Tier 6**

President Spence took the podium in front of 15,000 union members from all over New York at the March 8 rally to Fix Tier 6 at the MVP Arena in Albany, calling for pension reform to give state workers the dignity and respect they deserve in retirement. He was joined by more than 500 PEF members from Long Island to Buffalo. See some of the news coverage below:

- [More than 15,000 gather in Albany in support of changes to Tier 6](#) (ABC News10-Albany)
- [Gov. Hochul, union leaders rally in support of changes to Tier 6 of public pension plan](#) (Spectrum News)
- [Thousands rally at MVP Arena, urging lawmakers to fix New York's Tier 6 pensions](#) (CBS 6-Albany)
- [Union leaders push for Tier 6 pension reforms](#) (Newschannel 13-Albany)
- [Lawmakers Urged To Change Pension Plans of 780,000 Americans](#) (Newsweek)
- [Public employees push to sweeten retirement](#) (WXXI-AM in Rochester hosted a discussion with union leaders including PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio.)
- [Labor rally pushes to fix Tier 6](#) (Finger Lakes 1)



## An open letter from a PEF member at DOCCS

# PEF member pens open letter following assault at Lakeview

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*The following open letter was written by a PEF member who works at the Lakeview Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in Brocton, N.Y., who was violently assaulted by an incarcerated individual on Feb. 23, 2026. We will share more of the member's story in the March issue of The Communicator, but wanted to share this letter first as a powerful testament to the courage and grace being shown in the most difficult of circumstances.*

To Whom It May Concern,  
I pray this never happens to you. I pray you never experience the moment when life flashes before your eyes. A normal day suddenly shattered—cornered in a locked room, realizing you must fight for your life against a man twice your size and strength – or it all ends. All it takes is a single moment, and everything changes.

Right now, I write from a place of compassion. That does not mean I have always felt this way. Over the past 48 hours I have felt anger, shock, and deep hurt—emotions that do not resemble love. But as I sit here trying to make sense of it all, I have come to this.

I do not hate the man who attacked me. I do not hate the others who sat and watched as their counselor was beaten repeatedly, as though it were no more than a boring scene of a movie. I was angry and disappointed. Remaining angry would be easy, yes. But I choose to move past anger. What remains is sadness.

I wanted to believe there was more humanity in that room.

But I also understand self-preservation. I cannot fault them for self-preservation. I know I would not put myself between them and a 350 lb. man intent on violence. To do so could risk their own lives.

But if they are at risk, and I am at risk, and the officer outside the door is at risk—then what exactly are we doing?

Every day, my coworkers and I walk into these facilities with the same purpose: to listen, to guide, to offer support, and to provide opportunities for change. I do not pretend that I am responsible for anyone's rehabilitation. All I can do is offer the chance for it. What someone chooses to do with that opportunity is up to them.

But rehabilitation cannot exist in an environment where survival is the primary concern.

Restraints are often discussed as though they are a punishment. They are not. They are protection—for staff and for incarcerated individuals alike. People who must remain constantly on guard for their safety cannot meaningfully participate in rehabilitation.

This attack would never have happened if restraints had remained in place.

The individuals in that room would never have been forced to choose between their own safety and mine. An officer would never have been forced to choose between breaking protocol and risking his career or standing by while someone was killed.

This program once required restraints until individuals progressed through phases and demonstrated they could safely manage themselves. That was reasonable. It was cause and effect. If someone is a danger to staff or peers, they should not be unrestrained around staff or peers until they have proven otherwise.



Yet from the very first day restraints were removed, staff warned leadership that this would happen. Counselors and officers expressed fear. Some came to tears. Officers said openly that it was only a matter of time before someone was seriously hurt.

We spoke up.

No one listened.

Instead, we were told we were safe.

The truth is that the people who show up to work in these buildings do so because we still carry hope. We acknowledge the risks, yet we come back every day. We trust the officers who protect us. They are our only line of defense.

In my case, Officer Murdoch did far more than simply perform his job. According to policy, his duty is to wait for backup and check on me every thirty minutes. That is what is written.

But what these officers do goes far beyond what is written.

They risk their lives every day. They are fathers, brothers, sons, and friends. I have worked beside many of them for years, and I know their character. They care deeply about the safety of those they work with.

I am alive because of that.

What happened to me has replayed in my mind again and again. I still struggle to believe it was real. The same question echoes every time I relive it: Why?

I remember the moment he stood up and the sudden realization that nothing was stopping him. He was free to kill me. I remember asking him, "Why are you doing this?"

I still do not know the answer.

I do not believe he saw me as a human being—only a body to overpower. And because I do not believe his mind operates the way ours does, I cannot bring myself to hate him.

In fact, I believe the system may have failed him long before it failed me.

I will prosecute. I am the victim. But somewhere in his past, perhaps he was a victim too. Perhaps there were moments when intervention might have helped. Perhaps not.

What I do know is this: the system failed him, and it failed me.

And it is failing the people who serve this state.

I cannot understand how those responsible for shaping these policies can watch what is happening and remain unmoved. Are they truly blind? Or simply callous?

If nothing changes, someone will die. It will be either an incarcerated individual or a staff member. Families will lose fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives.

And then what?

That is how cycles begin. That is how division grows deeper.

All while a simple and reasonable solution exists.

In just 43 days since restraints were removed, there have already been more incidents of classroom violence than in the entire previous year. One cannot claim a commitment to reducing violence while ignoring the clear cause and effect of a policy change.

To do so is either ignorance or disregard.

As I lay on the ground, blind, I put my hands over my head, I did not know if he was coming back for more, and I did not know if help was coming. What I did know was in those seconds, or milliseconds, I thought my head couldn't take much more blunt force.

I will die here.

But I have two daughters, who need me. They do not deserve to grow up without their mother. I rolled over and I fought back with everything I had, until I saw a blur of feet coming into that locked door. I crawled out – still blind, still in shock. Disbelief. Still unsure if I would live. If I got hit in the right place, if my brain would swell or bleed.

I thought about my children.

I wanted to call them, call my husband, just to say I love them. To tell them to take care of each other. Not to not be angry. Just to love each other. To hold each other.

While in the ambulance a thought crossed my mind. I am an organ donor. At least my organs might go to others (RIP Riesen). I thought maybe that would be a story my children could tell. I thought, I will never leave them. I would watch over them forever.

I watched my husband run up to the ambulance with tears in his eyes. I gave him a thumbs up- because I was alive.

And by the grace of God, I am. Beyond bruises, strains, and scratches, I survived. I owe that to God. I carry Him with me and am not shy about it. He protected me. Since I am alive to speak, I will.

Let this not be a close call.

Let it be a moment someone finally listened.

Let it be a wake-up call.



# Let lawmakers know about PEF's budget priorities

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**By JIM CARR - President, PEF Statewide Retirees**

Legislators in Albany are in the thick of budget season and I'm asking retirees to educate themselves about [PEF's 2026-27 budget priorities](#). It's crucial that you contact your elected representatives, so they know what issues are most important to PEF members and retirees. In particular, I urge you to tell your State Senator and Assemblymember to reject a reduction in the Income Related Monthly Adjust Amount used by recipients of Medicare Part B.

The union makes it very easy to send emails on those topics and all of PEF's budget priorities. Just head to the [Legislative Action Center](#) on the PEF website to get started.

PEF Retirees submitted [written testimony](#) last month to a joint committee focused on Labor and Workforce Issues in the State budget. I encourage all retirees to read it and please consider advocating for yourselves and your union siblings. We are stronger when we raise our voices in support of each other!

In Solidarity,

Jim Carr  
President, PEF Statewide Retirees

# Your fellow members need your leave donations

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The following PEF members have reported a need for leave donations due to the need for medical treatment or recuperation from illness or injury.

Donations are made from annual leave and donors must retain at least 10 days of annual leave after donating. To donate leave, obtain a leave-donation form from your personnel or human resources office and submit it to that office. You may donate leave to employees at both the agency where you work and to those working at other state agencies.

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](mailto:MVPersonnel@omh.ny.gov).

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Kathleen Hill is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse. Email [leaves@upstate.edu](mailto:leaves@upstate.edu) to obtain a donation form.

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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.

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



February 9, 2026

Thanks to the PEF Council Leaders who spent time at union headquarters learning how best to support their members!



January 18, 2026

PEF members were back on the NYC Nurse Strike lines in solidarity with New York State Nurses Association at Bronx Montefiore and Mt. Sinai Hospitals.



February 25, 2026

Worksite contract meetings are underway with a great turnout at the State Office Bldg in Brooklyn! PEF members are United for a Fair Contract!



February 22, 2026

PEF VP Bruce Giddings and members of the PEF Executive Board from the Capital Region joined U.S. Rep. Paul D. Tonko in Colonie to rally with members from the National Association of Letter Carriers, who kick off negotiations for a fair contract this week.



March 9, 2026

PEF leaders, led by Secretary Treasurer Joe Donahue and VPs Darlene Williams and Bruce Giddings, attended the American-Irish Legislators Society St. Patrick's dinner in Albany.



February 28, 2026

Members of the Region 7 PAC and PEF leaders from DOCCS facilities in the North Country attended a meet and greet with Senator Dan Stec in Malone. Sen. Stec is endorsed by Region 7 and is a true friend of labor and an ally in the fight for changes to the HALT Act to make correctional facilities safer!



February 24, 2026

Region 4 members enjoyed an American Hockey League game at the War Memorial, watching the Syracuse Crunch play the Charlotte Checkers. The Central New York Area Labor Federation hosted a "Friends and Family Labor Night" to recognize union members across the region.



## Letters to the Editor

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

## We want to hear from you!

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



