

The COMMUNICATOR

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UNIFIED *for a*
FAIR CONTRACT!

Table of Contents

The President's Message	3
Executive Board approves budget, focuses on union strength and sets the tone for 2026	4
Region 9 members rank wages, workplace safety as top concerns during contract tour stops	8
Lobby Day focuses on Tier 6, nursing issues, safety in the workplace, and staffing	10
PEF Legislative Reception highlights working with legislators	14
PEF wins back pay for nurses at Batavia Veteran's Home	16
PEF secures third Higher Education Differential, other items outside of contract	17
PEF member pens open letter following assault at Lakeview	18
2 new Executive Board members seated; next round of Special Elections begin April 6	20
PEF in the News	21
Lobbying in Albany in support of retiree, nursing priorities	22
Your fellow members need your leave donations	23
Photo Highlights	24

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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



A busy spring for your union

The first quarter of 2026 is behind us — and we are starting the second quarter with momentum and results.

We begin with some great news on the Contract front. [Three provisions that were set to expire today \(April 2\) have been extended](#), including the \$600 Higher Education Differential (HED), a benefit we secured for the first time in 2024 and 2025. The HED recognizes the professionals in our union who have an Associate's degree or higher, or a license issued by the State Education Department.

The contract team also ensured continuation of supplementary Workers' Compensation benefits for PEF parole officers, and expedited suspension review rights for members who face disciplinary charges. My thanks to the Contract Team, led by Vice President Darlene Williams, and New York State Director of State Operations Jackie Bray for her willingness to consider PEF's requests to get these three items off the table so we can focus on the rest of the Contract.

[Region 9 members turned out in great numbers](#) to hear from the Contract Team over the course of the past six weeks. The team will travel to Region 1 in Western New York for meetings the week of April 20-24, and I strongly encourage you to sign up and attend a meeting if you are able. If you're not, we'll continue to update members on the [Contract page of the website](#), in the [PEF app](#), and via our social media accounts.

The PEF Executive Board convened for the first meeting of 2026 at the end of March, accomplishing a lot over the course of its two-day meeting. I was proud to swear in seven new board members, who stepped up to represent their colleagues and serve on the union's highest decision-making body outside of the annual Convention. Additional board seats remain open, and petitioning begins April 6. Visit the [PEF Elections page](#) for details.

Finally, I want to recognize our General Counsel's Office and Statewide Field Services team for once again doing what this union does best — making sure our members are treated fairly when it comes to the terms and conditions of their contract. [Their work secured back pay for three registered nurses at Batavia Veterans' Home who were performing out-of-title work](#), delivering thousands of dollars for them and their families.

We enter this next quarter focused, engaged, and ready to work. I wish you and your families a healthy and strong spring.

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Wayne Spence
PEF President



Left to right: David Mosier, Matthew Balling, Reissa Sookraj, Marie Denis, Scott Avidon, Margaret Dobbins and David Downing

Executive Board approves budget, focuses on union strength and sets the tone for 2026

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF's Executive Board held its first meeting of the year on March 26 and 27 in Albany. The 122 members of the board approved a budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, discussed the conclusion of the 2023-2026 collective bargaining agreement, as well as ongoing negotiations, and focused on the strength of the union as New York heads into a potentially decisive election year.

New board members sworn-in

PEF President Wayne Spence led the swearing-in of seven new executive board members who were elected by their co-workers to represent them: Scott Avidon (Workers' Compensation Board), Matthew Balling (DOT), Marie Denis (OMH), Margaret Dobbins (DOH), David Downing (DOCCS), David Mosier (DOCCS) and Reissa Sookraj (ITS). They will all serve three-year terms on the board.

New Fiscal Year, new budget

With PEF's fiscal year commencing on April 1, PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue presented a balanced budget to the executive board. The budget funds the union from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2027. It shows an increase in membership dues income of about \$2 million as new members continue to join PEF.

"Once again, the strength of our union is shown through our budget. As membership grows, with the help of PEF's Organizing Department, the union continues to be well-funded thanks to dues income," said Donahue.



There were some necessary increases in spending cited by the Secretary-Treasurer, particularly around computing costs. The security of member data is the top priority for PEF's Membership Information Systems (MIS) department. Additional costs were approved of about \$200,000 for MIS to update the union's technology and keep all systems secure.

The budget also included funds for new positions to grow PEF's support staff, including a Health Benefits Specialist in Western New York, a Director of Human Resources, a backup receptionist and office assistant and an executive assistant to the President.

The board voted to amend the budget to increase the amount of funds provided to PEF Regions to train stewards. Steward training is typically completed after work hours or on the weekends, but board members argued that setting aside some funds for training using EOL (Employee on Leave) time would help members maintain a better work-life balance.

“We’ve heard a lot from current and past stewards that not having the ability to use time for training and cutting into their free time is tough on them,” said Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger. “I think if we do what we can to ensure that there is some funding so that people can do their training without using their time, we would have more stewards and a stronger union.”

The executive board approved an allocation of \$375,000 for all regions to use to help provide EOL for steward training.

New Divisions created

PEF Divisions Committee Chair Gwendolyn Culpepper presented the Executive Board with two proposals for new divisions. Thirty-three (33) members at the Finger Lakes Region NYS Parks and Historic Sites signed a petition to join PEF and create Division 416. Meanwhile, in Queens, the NYS Veterans’ Home at St. Albans proposed splitting from the current Division 199, to form Division 417. Both proposed divisions were approved by the board.

Endorsements approved by the board

PEF’s Statewide and Regional Political Action Committees brought endorsement recommendations to the Executive Board ahead of the primary elections in June. The board was given a chance to review candidates seeking election or re-election following the vetting process conducted by the committees.



“We have legislators that we agree with 80% of the time, but we may have two issues we don’t agree with, so we try to work through the issues and not throw the baby out with the bathwater,” said PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio. “We try to make a strategic decision. This is not about anyone’s personal ideologies. This is about what’s good for the union.”

The board voted to endorse Comptroller Tom DiNapoli and Attorney General Letitia James in their reelection campaigns, as well as a handful of State Senators and Assemblymembers.

RELATED: [DiNapoli, James earn PEF endorsement](#)

Lakeview and DOCCS update

On February 23, a PEF member who works as a rehabilitation counselor at Lakeview Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in Brocton, N.Y., was violently assaulted by an incarcerated individual. She was doing classroom work with unrestrained students in a locked room. A correction officer stood guard outside but is not allowed—per protocol—to enter in the event of an emergency without backup. The officer assigned that day, Officer Samuel Murdoch, upon noticing the attack, entered the room to de-escalate and prevent further harm. PEF Health and Safety is providing ongoing support to the counselor, who is recovering. She wrote an [open letter](#) to her assailant and DOCCS

management as she navigates the traumatic situation.

President Spence presented NYSOPBA President Chris Summers with a plaque to share with Officer Murdoch for his bravery and quick action that likely saved the PEF member’s life.

“Officer Murdoch’s courage and sense of duty while serving New Yorkers serves as a beacon of hope and pride for us all,” reads the plaque.

Since the attack, PEF has filed a complaint with the Department of Labor’s Public Employee Safety & Health (PESH) branch and done a walkthrough of the facility. Following the walkthrough, at PEF’s request, DOCCS provided 50 Personal Alarm Systems for staff, but more are needed.

“Kudos to the council leader at Lakeview for responding quickly, getting detailed and real time information to Vice President Williams and mobilizing all of us so we could organize our efforts and get there as fast as we could,” said Vice President DiAntonio.

Programming at Lakeview was suspended following the incident, but was recently restarted with some protocol changes that PEF insisted upon. No longer will one staff member be in a room alone with an incarcerated individual(s). There must be at least two staff members in every room when programming is delivered. In addition, room doors will remain open and not locked so correction officers can more quickly respond in the event of an emergency. As a result of PEF’s advocacy, Lakeview is also now looking at using physical barriers, restraints, and other measures to keep staff and incarcerated individuals safe.

“I believe DOCCS is in crisis. Everything we asked for prior to her being assaulted, they implemented after she was assaulted,” said President Spence. “That tells me it’s literally going to take our potential death for them to recognize change. And that shouldn’t be.”

PEF will be hosting a meeting of union leaders from DOCCS facilities in June and then the traditional Labor Management conference in September, both with the goal of lifting up concerns at facilities as well as giving facilities with no council leaders or stewards a chance to be heard and build leadership within the union.

Convention 2026 and beyond

The next PEF Convention will be held in Nagara Falls October 18-21, 2026. PEF staff from Communications, MIS, Facilities and Special Events conducted a comprehensive site visit to the Niagara Falls Convention Center on March 19 and 20. The site offers a walkable downtown area, plenty of space for breakout rooms, a large vendor area, and access to 12 hotels.



While many delegates reported enjoying the 2025 Convention in Lake Placid, some remarked that the amenities and hotels were spread out around town which limited accessibility. The convention committee hopes that denser yet spacious Niagara Falls will alleviate those issues.

The board agreed to discuss options for Convention 2027 and 2028 at their June meeting.



COPE still growing

COPE – the Committee on Political Education run by PEF’s international parent unions AFT and SEIU – continues to be an important part of PEF’s lobbying efforts. Only COPE funds can be used for federal lobbying. The law prohibits unions from using member dues for that purpose. COPE Coordinator Don Morgenstern reported that COPE contributions have increased more than 30% for both members and retirees so far in 2026.

President Spence added that when he first took office in 2015, COPE was not a priority for PEF. However, during his four terms, contributions have increased by more than 200%.

“When I became president in 2015, COPE was \$50,000,” he told the board. “Today, we’re at \$150,000. We’re doing pretty well.”

Morgenstern said that while PEF is on track to meet its COPE goals for the year, there is still plenty of time to do more.

“When SEIU runs a report on all the unions that contribute to COPE, PEF is consistently one of the top 10 SEIU locals on track,” said Morgenstern. “It is up to you, Executive Board members, to educate members about why COPE is important. Every dollar matters, even the little amounts.”

RELATED: [Sign up or increase your COPE contribution](#)

New Employee Orientation and New Employee Meeting policy update

New York State labor law includes a provision that allows unions to have access to newly promoted, transferred, hired or rehired employees. But depending on the location, it can be difficult for PEF to meet new employees.

To that end, the Executive Board introduced a new policy that takes advantage of new time codes created by the state that allow for the union—specifically, council leaders—to travel to and from New Employee Meetings and New Employee Orientations. The code covers members who have to travel; however, it does not cover reimbursements. Costs such as mileage should be reimbursed through division budgets.

The adopted policy is effective statewide, and council leaders will be trained on how the policy is to be implemented.

The Executive Board will meet again on June 4 and 5 in Albany. Should PEF Contract negotiations still be underway by then, President Spence said he will urge members to join the board for some sort of public action to push the Governor to deliver a fair contract.



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Today**



Region 9 members rank wages, workplace safety as top concerns during contract tour stops

By **COMMUNICATIONS STAFF**

Members across Region 9 turned out for Contract Tour meetings at Rockland, Rockland Children's, and Mid-Hudson psychiatric centers; Helen Hayes Hospital; Montrose Veteran's Home; the Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation, and various correctional facilities last month.

Unlike in past years, the PEF contract team presented 24 proposals to the governor's team during the first meeting on Feb. 2, said Vice President and Contract Team Chair Darlene Williams. The team was ready to put the proposals forward immediately, thanks largely to President Wayne Spence's decision to keep the same contract team from the 2023-2026 negotiations.

"While I can't go into specifics on each proposal, one of the biggest things we're pushing for is an increase in across-the-board raises higher than 3%," she said to hundreds of members at sometimes standing-room-only locations.

President Spence told members at Montrose Veteran's Home that since he was first elected union president in 2015, New York State's minimum wage and State legislator salary increases have far outpaced that of state workers, and former Gov. Andrew Cuomo even gave himself and all future governors a raise.

“

We have affordability problems and 3% per year is not going to do it.

- PEF President Wayne Spence

”

"Everybody got a salary increase except state workers!" he said. "Not just PEF, but overall state workers. We are averaging about 30% (since 2015). That's nothing compared to what it costs to live in New York. We have affordability problems and 3% per year is not going to do it."

A member at Rockland Psychiatric Center hopes the contract will address that affordability issue.

"Housing, food, everything went up," said Martin Tamfu, a licensed clinical social worker. "A fair contract means taking into account all these changes in our cost of living."

Wages and workplace safety came out as the top concerns at most of the locations.

"The value of a good union to me is somebody that has my back and cares about what is happening to me on the frontlines and protects my interests as a state employee," said Shari Wall, head recreation therapist at Montrose Veteran's Home. "We also need the ability to regulate the safety of our employees. We are dealing with so many different kinds of patients."

Jesse Martin Jr., the head of pastoral services at Montrose, echoed her sentiments.

"I want to see my coworkers being paid wages that represent the work and care that they do here for the veterans," he said. "In addition to that I want them to be safe and, in an environment where they feel safe."

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.

For Hector Santiago, a new PEF member and optical laboratory supervisor at Walkkill Correctional Facility, the expansion of

hazardous duty pay and other health and safety benefits are top of mind.

"I have two children, and I have a pacemaker, so safety is very important to me," said Santiago. "I am going 13 years working for DOCCS and I have seen too many things happen that should not happen."

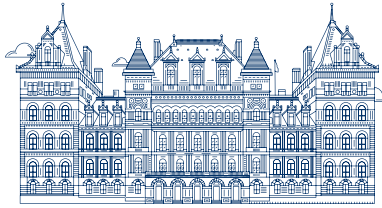
At Mid-Hudson Psychiatric Center, Jodie Gewing, a pharmacist, said she wants to see the contract team fight for affordable health care and preventative care. "Instead of waiting for us to be reactive, let's be proactive," she said.

"I want to see the union advocating for individuals who really do not have the time because they are so involved in their work," said Lydia Wright, a nurse and staff development coordinator at Montrose. "I hope that in the next few years I will see even more benefits afforded to New York State workers."

The team is planning to visit PEF Region 1 (Western New York) the last full week of April. Stay tuned to the [Contract Tour webpage](#) for details or find them in the [PEF app](#).



Clockwise from top left, PEF members show their solidarity with the Contract Team at: the offices of the Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation, Mid-Hudson Forensic Psychiatric Center, the New York State Veterans Home at Montrose, Helen Hayes Hospital, Rockland Psychiatric Center, and the Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center.



2026 Lobby Day

Lobby Day focuses on Tier 6, nursing issues, safety in the workplace, and staffing

By **KATE STICKLES**

Getting legislative support for pension reform, body scanners at facilities, and expansion of nurse committees is crucial as the April 1 deadline nears for the New York State budget.

Nearly 50 members and leaders took the union's message directly to elected officials during PEF's Lobby Day on March 17, meeting with legislators and their staff.

Fix Tier 6

Reforming the pension plan is critical for recruiting and retaining staff was a top message during the meetings. As union members from across New York made clear at their [rally on March 8](#) at MVP Arena in Albany, Tier 6 lacks the strength and appeal of earlier tiers and no longer draws people to state service.

"The Legislature has helped by reverting back to 5-year vesting and 3-year final average salary calculation, but we still need to reduce the contribution bands to 3% for all, enact a 30-year/55-years-old retirement option, and recalculate overtime into the pension calculation," said Vice President Randi DiAntonio, chair of the Statewide Political Action Committee. "PEF prefers a reduction in contributions this year to increase members' disposable income. We believe the contribution band change will help workers now with affordability."

Body scanners

Serious violence continues to be a problem at state facilities.

PEF supports the Governor's budget proposal to permit body scanning equipment at Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) facilities to help prevent non-metallic weapons, such as ceramic and 3-D printed types, from being brought into buildings.

Additionally, PEF would like to see the proposal expanded to include scanners at secure/forensic Office of Mental Health (OMH) and Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) facilities.

In a meeting with Assemblywoman Stacey Pheffer Amato (D-23rd District), Region 1 Coordinator Vinny Ciatello from Buffalo Psychiatric Center (BPC) and co-chair of the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee, recounted how PEF member Ed Gordon was stabbed by a patient at BPC in April 2024.

The stories of assaults resonated with legislators, including Assemblymember Karina Reyes (D-87th District), a nurse herself who continues to work shifts at Montefiore downstate, and Assemblywoman Alicia Hyndman (D-29th District).

Body scanners at facilities known to treat aggressive or violent clients could prevent incidents of violence against both staff and other patients. Several legislators expressed support or agreed to look into the proposal.

One of PEF's letter-writing campaigns supports a package of bills pending before the Legislature that would help to protect workers by preventing weapons from entering state-operated facilities, creating safer workplaces and holding people accountable when they assault a public employee. The ongoing threat of violence on the job for state workers is something that the Legislature must address immediately. Send a letter to your legislators [here](#).

Nurse committees

Staffing ratios are essential for workplace safety and high-quality patient care.

Staffing is “very, very bad,” said Ivy Rose Lee, a registered nurse at SUNY Downstate, in a conversation with Assemblywoman Reyes. “We are educating new graduates and they don’t stay.”

Having a Nurse Committee at the hospital affords nurses an opportunity to discuss issues and review incident reports.

“We feel we are being heard,” she said. “We can pull up POAs (protest of assignment forms) and discuss what happened. We all should be heard.”

The same is not required at other facilities where PEF nurses work, such as the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), OMH, OCFS and OPWDD.

“These agencies are some of the toughest to fill vacancies and have high levels of overtime,” said Vice President Randi DiAntonio.

Committees help determine schedules and appropriate staffing levels and ratios. Nurses in each group shared similar stories of untenable nurse-to-patient ratios, making it hard to provide the level of care needed.

“You do the best you can,” said Cicatello. “As a nurse on an inpatient unit, I want to feel satisfied but some days when I leave, I ask myself, ‘Did I make a difference today?’”

Several legislators expressed support for nurse committees.

Transfer of medical oversight

As a former PEF member at the State Education Department (SED), Assemblywoman Hyndman expressed her support in opposing the Governor’s proposal to transfer medical licensure and discipline oversight from SED to the Department of Health (DOH).

“SED is already equipped and has been handling these tasks for more than 100 years,” said VP DiAntonio. “Transferring this authority to DOH could lead to politically motivated changes. SED is an independent department, while DOH is under direct control of the Governor.”

Nurse practitioner modernization

In 2022, a new law eliminated statutory requirements for nurse practitioners with more than 3,600 hours of experience to maintain collaborative relationships with physicians. That law was extended twice and is set to expire in June 2026.

PEF supports a proposal to make permanent the ability of nurse practitioners to practice on their own.

“We’re already doing it,” said Amy Pacholk, a nurse at Stony Brook University Hospital and co-chair of the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee. “It’s allowed in many other states and there are already shortages in the health care field, especially in rural areas. Many people have a personal connection with their nurse practitioners.”

Retiree issues

Several PEF Retirees joined Retirees President Jim Carr to lobby on behalf of issues important to the union’s retired members.

“New York’s retired public employees ask that policymakers reject proposals that increase out-of-pocket costs for those on fixed incomes and enact policies that support maintaining the standard of living for our retirees,” said Carr.

Retirees urged legislators to reject the unilateral reduction of the income related monthly adjustment amount (IRMAA); and pass legislation to improve the cost-of-living adjustment and a skilled nursing benefit.

You can read more about all of PEF’s priorities – and send letters supporting the union’s requests – [on the PEF website](#).



PEF leaders, members, and staff spent the day March 17 at the Capitol lobbying legislators on issues from Tier 6 reform to nurse practitioner modernization and body scanners. From top left, clockwise, groups met with Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer Amato, Assemblymember Jeffrey Dinowitz, Assemblymember Brian Cunningham, Senator Siela Bynoe, Assemblymember Al Stirpe, Senator and Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Senator Dan Stec.



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2026 Legislative Reception

PEF Legislative Reception highlights working with legislators

By NAJEE WALKER

Following a long, successful Lobby Day at the State Capitol on March 17 in Albany, PEF members and members of the legislature attended PEF's annual Legislative Reception. The reception is a chance for members of the Senate and Assembly to meet with PEF members from various agencies across the state to discuss the union's priorities face-to-face ahead of the passage of the New York State budget in April.

PEF continued to ride the wave following the sold-out "Fix Tier 6 Rally" in Albany on March 8 that saw 15,000 members from various unions show up to demand pension reform. Legislators spoke directly with leaders and members about why fixing Tier 6 is so important.

"With so many of our members telling me they are struggling, we need to make sure we are bolstering the workforce by looking long-term," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "We need to make sure legislators hear us when we speak. We need Tier 6 reform now and we have the power to make it happen."

Nearly two-thirds of PEF members are in Tier 6 of the pension plan, and the union supports reducing member contribution rates and other reforms (such as allowing retirement at age 55 after a 30-year career) that will bring Tiers 5 and 6 of the plan more in line with Tier 4.

President Spence took a moment to thank New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli for ensuring that the pension system is fully funded. DiNapoli said that he believes that as PEF and other labor unions fight for reform to Tier 6, they have allies in the legislature.

"I know they're certainly working on fixing Tier 6, but they're also fighting for adequate staffing in all our state agencies," said DiNapoli. "I see firsthand every day the excellence, the professionalism and the dedication of the men and women of PEF."

PEF is also in negotiations with the state for a new contract. At the reception, President Spence made sure that legislators understood that he and the contract team will not rest until there is a fair contract on the table.

"On April 1, the union that represents 60,000 members will be outside of a contract. The contract will expire. And if the time comes, I will call on members of the Legislature to stand with us if we have to rally for a contract," said President Spence. "You have stood with us before. I am hopeful that there is a path to a contract, but if there isn't, I have to do what the union does: Make noise. And I hope you will stand with us."



Value of the
UNION

PEF wins back pay for nurses at Batavia Veteran's Home

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF secured a major victory and an award of back pay in an out-of-title grievance brought by three registered nurse 1 members (RN1s) at the Batavia Veteran's Home who were assigned duties of a higher-graded registered nurse 2 (RN2).

"This is what union membership is all about," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "Fighting for our members at every level, from contract grievances like this to legislative lobbying. It's important that members who are facing contract violations reach out to PEF so we can assess the situation and provide guidance."

In this particular case, the win means more money in the nurse's pockets. The judge awarded back pay in the amount of the difference between the salaries of RN1 and RN2, with interest, for every day the members performed the out-of-title duties. RN1s are Salary Grade 18 (hiring rate of \$66,951 and job rate of \$85,138) and RN2s are Salary Grade 20 (hiring rate of \$74,193 and job rate of \$94,121).

"The judge determined the duties constituted more than supervision of direct care or nursing care activities, which would be appropriate for an RN1," said PEF General Counsel John Svare. "Instead, the duties required a greater managerial responsibility; the nurses were the highest-ranking RN at their work location and directed all other medical staff."



In the decision, the judge found that the Office of Employee Relations (OER) disregarded the nurses' core allegations that they were assigned the role of "nurse manager/charge nurse" and were performing out-of-title duties of a higher grade, agreeing with PEF's assertion that the "charge nurse" duties appeared exclusively in the RN2 Classification Standard.



PEF secures third Higher Education Differential, other items outside of contract

As Contract negotiations continue, PEF President Wayne Spence and members of the Contract Team succeeded in extending three items from PEF's last contract that were set to expire. The three items are:

- The \$600 Higher Education Differential (HED) that was paid in 2024 and 2025 to PEF members with a two-year college degree or higher or any license issued by the State Education Department will now be paid this Spring for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. The Contract Team continues to advocate for an increase in the amount of the HED and will fight to make it an annual, permanent payment.
- Expedited Suspension Review and virtual Article 33 hearings for any member facing disciplinary suspensions will be continued. This benefit is very important for those members unfortunate enough to face suspensions while disciplinary charges are pending.
- Enhanced Supplemental Workers' Compensation benefits for employees in Parole titles will continue. This guarantees that PEF Parole Officers working a dangerous job will have improved benefits should they be injured at work.

Extending these three items now means the State cannot use them as leverage as they negotiate the rest of the PS&T contract with PEF. These wins guarantee some extra money in nearly every member's pocket and provide significant benefits to members facing disciplinary suspensions and Parole members who are injured on the job.

"I'd like to thank VP Williams and the entire Contract Team for their determination and hard work to secure these wins," said President Spence. "I wish to also express my thanks to Director of State Operations Jackie Bray for her willingness to consider and then act on PEF's requests, as well as the PEF staff who helped get this deal done."

"I'm proud of the Contract Team for aggressively pursuing the goals President Spence set for us at the start of negotiations," said Contract Chair Darlene Williams. "His direct involvement with the Governor's office was instrumental in getting these items into a signed Memorandum of Agreement outside of the overall contract."

PEF member pens open letter following assault at Lakeview

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.



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.



2 new Executive Board members seated; next round of Special Elections begin April 6

By **KATE STICKLES**

Two vacant seats on the PEF Executive Board have been filled following the union's January 2026 Special Elections.

Reissa Alderman will fill Seat 173, representing certain members of the Office of Information Technology Services in Region 8; and Matthew Balling will fill Seat 505, representing certain members in DOT (PEF Region 1).

Petitioning for the April 2026 Special Election begins at 9 a.m. April 6, 2026.

The following seats are vacant:

- **Seat 15:** Civil Service
- **Seat 25:** Elmira, Groveland, Collins, Lakeview, Wyoming, Attica (DOCCS)
- **Seat 50:** Green Haven, Corrections Central Office, Coxsackie, Bedford Hills, Taconic (DOCCS)
- **Seat 103:** SUNY Stonybrook (Division 225), Long Island Veteran's Home, SUNY Colleges (Westbury, Maritime, College of Optometry) with last names beginning with D, B, I, Q, T, W
- **Seat 127:** Homeland Security
- **Seat 161:** State Police and Criminal Justice Services
- **Seat 200:** Helen Hayes, Veteran's Homes (Batavia, NYC, Oxford, Montrose)
- **Seat 210:** State Insurance Fund (Regions 7-9)
- **Seat 300:** Central NYDDSO/RO (Regions 4 and 6) and OPWDD Main Office (Regions 4 and 6)
- **Seat 510:** DOT Region 8 and Poughkeepsie Division 172

Petitions may be downloaded from www.pef.org/elections starting on April 6 at 9 a.m. or members interested in running may call the Divisions Department at 800-342-4306. Petitions will not be available for pickup at any PEF office. Petitions must be received prior to 5 p.m. on April 27, 2026.

For contested elections, ballots will be mailed May 18, 2026.



PEF in the News: Drone delivering contraband seized at Marcy CF

Drone with contraband seized at Marcy Correctional Facility

“Drone-delivered contraband is a dangerous and rapidly evolving threat inside our correctional facilities,” PEF President Wayne Spence was quoted as saying in various news reports about a drone that was seized after dropping two eight-inch knives and other contraband behind the walls of Marcy Correctional Facility in Utica on March 14. “When drugs, weapons, or toxic substances make their way behind the walls, it puts everyone at risk — including the civilian workforce that keeps these facilities operating every day.”

The drone was recovered by facility staff and no harm was done — this time.

(Read more at [LocalSyr.com](#), [CBS 6 WRGB-Albany](#), [CNY Homepage](#))



Police seized the contraband and drone shown above after an incident on Sunday, March 14 at the Marcy Correctional Facility. (Photo provided by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision)

Lobbying in Albany in support of retiree, nursing priorities

By JIM CARR - President, PEF Statewide Retirees

April is New York State budget time! I want to thank PEF President Wayne Spence and the PEF Legislative Office for their hard work organizing this year's Nurse Lobby Day. I had a wonderful experience leading a team of young nurses while talking with a good number of legislators.

We advocated for a number of PEF's budget priorities as well as retiree issues including improving the "diet COLA," (Cost of Living Adjustment), rejecting a proposal to cut IRMAA, and protecting health care and skilled nursing benefit equity.

My team was very much focused on the issues at their facilities, like staffing, employee safety, and especially fixing Tier 6! These first timers were very knowledgeable about the issues we face at our various facilities and even though they were first timers they

handled themselves extremely well. All the legislators we talked to were interested in what was happening in our facilities, especially at the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

Legislators need to hear from their constituents about what is happening, and it's our job as union members to educate them about our work and issues. In-district lobbying is very important when it comes to getting your legislators to listen to your concerns. I had a wonderful experience during this year's Statewide Political Action Committee Nurse Lobby session.

If you have some time, read our submitted legislative testimony by following this [link](#). It's never too late to write to your legislators, so also take a look at the letter-writing campaigns [here](#).



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.

Angelia Doll is a taxpayer services specialist 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Albany.

Maritza Echevarria is an ICM at Bronx Psychiatric Center in the Bronx.

Kimberly Ernst-Harris is a supervising offender rehabilitation coordinator at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision central office in Albany.

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.

June Gilroy is a policy analyst 2 at the Authorities Budget Office in Albany. Contact BSCBenefitsAdmin@ogs.ny.gov to obtain a donation form.

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.

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

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. Email HR.LeaveManagement@its.ny.gov to obtain a donation form.

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.

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

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.



March 28, 2026

PEF turned out at No Kings Day rallies in Albany & Staten Island!



March 25, 2026

PEF members and union friends from CSEA and NYSCOPBA took part in an AVIRT (Active Violence Immediate Response Training) course at PEF headquarters, led by AFT Trainer Brian Bisson.



March 25, 2026

Congratulations to PEF Membership Benefits Program Administrator Stephanie McLean-Beathley for her recognition by LaborPress for her leadership, dedication and service to the labor movement! Stephanie and her fellow honorees were celebrated at a Women in Labor reception in Nassau County.



March 21, 2026

PEF Region 4 hosted federal and state lawmakers in the Syracuse office to talk about fixing Tier 6, workplace safety and other union priorities.



March 28, 2026

A packed house in Plattsburgh, as PEF Region 7 members took the Defensive Driving Class that helps members lower their car insurance premiums.



March 14, 2026

PEF Region 3 hosted federal and state lawmakers for their Legislative Breakfast on March 14, 2026, at the union's Rochester office.



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