

Vol. 44

# *The* COMMUNICATOR

No. 4

MAY 2026

# A FAIR CONTRACT FOR AFFORDABILITY

---

From Buffalo to Allegany, the PEF Contract Team heard a clear and urgent message from members: the rising cost of living is outpacing wages and making it harder for families to get by. As negotiations continue, the union is pushing for stronger wage increases, affordable healthcare, and protections that reflect the real financial and workplace challenges members face across New York.

---

# Table of Contents

The President's Message	3
Contract Tour swing through Western New York focuses on affordability	4
PEF ramps up pressure on statewide pay study	6
Public safety requires rigorous training. So why is ICE cutting back	8
SUNY Downstate fight the subject of AFT Health Care Q&A with union leaders	9
Affordability is an everyday struggle	10
PEF urges DOCCS to address spike in chemical exposures	12
Celebrating the dedicated nurses within our union	14
Women leading the way: committee growth, pay equity, labor history, and social justice	18
Coming together for a member in need	21
North Country leaders gather for annual conference	22
PEF members play key role at Division of Human Rights	24
New Civil Service testing facility in Capital Region opens in Cohoes	26
A Q&A with New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli	28
Workers Memorial Day highlights past promises and ongoing goals around safety at work	30
Scholarship, incentive program for STEM	31
Somos Albany: Building coalitions with union leaders, elected officials, and community advocates	32
Key PEF-supported bill for body scanners at OCFS now heads to the Governor	34
Article 15 grant program awards up to \$50,000 for workforce, labor-management training	35
Four seats filled on Executive Board; two go to balloting	36
Telethon raises \$1M for children's hospital, charities	38
Former PEF President Roger Benson, 1945-2026	39
RETIREEES IN ACTION: Stay informed, engaged, and vote!	41
Your fellow members need your leave donations	43
Photo Highlights	44

## THE COMMUNICATOR

Volume 44 No.4  
May 2026 (0745-6514)

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

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

### The Communicator Staff

Rob Merrill Managing Editor  
Curtis Canham Graphic Artist  
Kate Stickle Reporter/Editor  
Najee Walker Reporter/Writer  
Laury Schrom Junior Graphic Artist  
Kristina Willbrant Comm Coordinator  
Kaitlin Sheehan Digital Communications Specialist

## Officers of PEF

Wayne Spence President  
Joe Donahue Secretary-Treasurer  
Randi DiAntonio Vice President  
Bruce Giddings Vice President  
Darlene Williams Vice President

### Regional Coordinators

Vincent Cicutello, Region 1  
Shelby Wisneski, Region 2  
Leisa Abraham, Region 3  
Monica Moore, Region 4  
Scott Staub, Region 5  
Christopher Dunham, Region 6  
Barbara Stransky, Region 7  
Danielle Bridger, Region 8  
Gabriela Franklyn, Region 9  
Tamara Martin, Region 10  
Bernadette O'Connor, Region 11  
Corinne Testa, Region 12

## Trustees

Muriel Hardy-Lee, Kelly Nadeau, Mohan Radhakrishna

### PEF Regional Field Offices

Region 1 Buffalo 1-800-462-1462  
Region 2 Elmira/Hornell 1-800-724-5001  
Region 3 Rochester 1-800-724-5003  
Region 4 Syracuse 1-800-724-5004  
Region 5 Binghamton 1-800-724-4998  
Region 6 Utica 1-800-724-5005  
Region 7 Potsdam 1-888-498-8532  
Region 8 Albany 1-800-342-4306  
Region 9 Poughkeepsie 1-800-548-4870  
Region 10 Manhattan/Bronx 1-800-522-8700  
Region 11 Brooklyn/Queens/Staten Island 1-866-897-9775  
Region 12 Long Island 1-800-832-5284

Advertising in this publication does not represent an endorsement by PEF or its members.

Members wishing to change their email/ mailing address may call 800-342-4306, x221, or email [jwright@pef.org](mailto:jwright@pef.org).

PEF is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO and Services Employees International Union.



**Metro NY Labor  
Communications  
Council**

# The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE

---



## Happy Public Service Recognition Month!

May is always one of the busiest on our union calendar and this issue of The Communicator certainly reflects that. From a [leadership conference for Regions 6 and 7](#), to demanding the release of the [comprehensive pay study](#) that was commissioned more than a year ago, to the [continued negotiations for a successor contract](#), PEF is truly on the move!

May is also the month when the labor movement recognizes all sorts of jobs – from [nurses](#) to correction officers to mental health professionals to teachers, and to everyone who has devoted their career to public service. I say it every month but thank you all for your dedication and professionalism. “New York works because we do,” is more than just a catchy slogan. It is the essence of public service, and I am grateful that every May we remind everyone of that.

It is ironic that while we celebrate the public servants who make New York work, we are witnessing familiar disfunction in Albany. On May 7, [Governor Hochul held a press conference](#) to announce “an agreement has been reached with legislative leaders on key priorities” in the State budget. Hours later, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie told the press “[there is no budget deal](#).” The only thing I know at this point? When the details are released, your union will analyze the budget bills and provide members with an analysis of the impact they will have on state agencies and the work you do.

As for that work, I was pleased to see the [opening of the first of a dozen computer-based civil service testing centers](#) across the State in Cohoes. PEF has been advocating for years to modernize the merit and fitness system. This center — and 11 more to follow — will make promotional exams more convenient and easier to administer. They are a key building block when it comes to recruiting and retaining the quality professionals New York needs in its workforce.

In terms of the contract that you, the PEF workforce, deserve: The team continues to press hard for your priorities at the negotiating table. Affordability is the top concern, so [we asked members in Buffalo and NYC to share their stories](#). Be on the lookout for rallies in your area as we escalate our demands for a fair contract!

Finally, a few words of appreciation for [New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli](#). He graciously answered a half dozen questions for us in this issue about his public service and the principles he follows when investing the New York State pension fund. I hope it informs members as they consider who to vote for in next month's primary, which will be held on June 23.

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wayne Spence  
PEF President

# A FAIR CONTRACT FOR AFFORDABILITY

## Contract Tour swing through Western New York focuses on affordability

By **NAJEE WALKER**

From Buffalo to Allegany, April 20-24, members of the PEF Contract Team – led by PEF Vice President and Contract Chair Darlene Williams and Region 1 Coordinator Vincent Cicatello – heard one common message: The cost of living is too damn high.

That's why addressing affordability issues in the next PEF contract is so crucial.

"We have heard PEF members loud and clear," Cicatello said to members at OMH, DOCCS, DOT, DEC, Parks and Recreation and other worksites who came out in high numbers to hear updates from the team. "Salaries are not keeping up with inflation – including the high cost of groceries, utility bills and gas prices. Many members are experiencing insecurities in being able to pay the bills required to support their families. Some members are telling us that they cannot afford rent, and putting food on their table has become challenging. Other members are seeking assistance and are getting in line at local food pantries."

Among the 24 PEF proposals delivered to the State on the first day of negotiations – Feb. 2, 2026 – was one dealing with Article 7, Compensation.

"We know that many of you are struggling, and we know that 3% just isn't going to cut it," said VP Williams. "We also know that with all the instability in the world, we may need more as time goes on. That is why for each year of the contract, we're asking for a percentage increase. We do not want to end our next contract at a lower percentage than where we start."

Health care costs have increased for PEF members by nine percent. The Contract Team noted that at the negotiating table, the state has tried to push for a change in healthcare costs.

"The members are concerned, and several are facing hardships in being able to support themselves and their family members," said Cicatello. "One anonymous member during the tour said, 'New York State is just disrespecting us,' when talking about the proposed medication increases and seemingly wanting to force us to go in network. Many PEF members are not only upset, but are concerned that they will not be able to afford the cost to care for themselves and their loved ones."

Members across Region 1 spoke candidly about different issues. For members at OMH and DOCCS facilities, safety was one of the central concerns. As violence continues to rise and illegal contraband makes its way into the facilities, members felt that more needs to be done to keep them safe at work. For other members, bullying and retaliation were also top of mind.

"We have been negotiating articles that deal with hazardous duty pay," said VP Williams. "While this is being negotiated, PEF is committed to working with the legislature to pass more significant changes to DOCCS and O-Agency facilities to help keep our members safe."

For members at DOH, OMIG, OTDA, WCB, and several other agencies located in the Ellicott Square building in Buffalo, parking was a main concern. Many pay hundreds of dollars for parking, on top of other commuting costs.

The Contract Team also met with members at Roswell Park. They discussed both the main table contract, which applies to all PEF members as well as special provisions for Roswell Park members, including proposals on safety and security at the cancer hospital.

"In the past, we have negotiated Roswell Park contracts separately and after we finished the main contract," said VP Williams. "It was important for the team, and the PEF members at Roswell Park, that we not do that this time. The members at Roswell Park deserve a fair contract as soon as possible, just like we all do."

Finally, the Contract Team shared that they are seeking to bring dental coverage under PEF's control. On the table is a proposal for the union to administer its own dental plan, like CSEA and UUP, which should result in cost savings and more network dentists across the State.

"We've heard that some people are fine with the current coverage, but we've also heard plenty of members say otherwise," said VP Williams. "We believe it's time to take the dental coverage in-house and to figure out how best to serve all members."

At the end of each meeting, VP Williams came back around to affordability and told members no matter where they live in New York, the reality is the same.

"Coming from Downstate born and raised in Brooklyn and now living on Staten Island, I understand firsthand the challenges our members face in the lower regions," she said. "However, what this past week has reinforced for me is that regardless of geography, the core issues impacting our members remain the same. Whether you are in the heart of Brooklyn or in Buffalo, affordability is a challenge for all of us."

*Editor's Note: The contract team met again with representatives from the State the last three days of April and will be meeting again May 20 and 21. Members can find the latest updates at [www.pef.org/contract](http://www.pef.org/contract).*



# PEF ramps up pressure on statewide pay study

PEF President Wayne Spence sent an email blast to all members on May 1 with a simple message: Tell New York State to release the comprehensive pay study they conducted.

“As the PEF Contract Team travels around the State and meets with members, we are hearing loud and clear that affordability is a universal problem no matter where you live or what job you do,” said President Spence in the email. “Everything is going up, except for wages. That is why it’s more important than ever that New York complete the compensation study and release the results.”

In 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul pledged to commission a study to look into how State workers are compensated. PEF was among the loudest labor voices pushing for the data, because the union believes that the state needs to provide market-based salaries for its professional, scientific and technical (PS&T) workforce. Inadequate pay is one of the main reasons PEF members leave their State jobs, and one of the chief deterrents when it comes to hiring new staff.

In 2025, the New York State Department of Civil Service finally selected a vendor to do the study which was slated to be completed on January 15, 2026. PEF’s goal from the outset was to use the data to argue for salary increases and other economic benefits during contract negotiations. PEF leaders have now been told the study won’t be finished until July 15, 2026, more than three months after PEF’s PS&T contract expired on April 1.



Commissioner of the New York State Department of Civil Service Timothy Hogues and Governor Kathy Hochul

Members are encouraged to send this email to Governor Kathy Hochul and the Commissioner of the New York State Department of Civil Service Timothy Hogues. Like the legislative letters PEF asks members to send every session pushing for union priorities, these letters really do make a difference. A union’s strength is in its numbers and if tens of thousands of PEF members register their support, it will help push the Governor and Commissioner to publicly release the study.



# Stay connected to PEF on your mobile device!

---

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.

**Download  
Today**

# Public safety requires rigorous training. So why is ICE cutting back?

By PEF PRESIDENT WAYNE SPENCE

*Editor's note: PEF is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and this article originally appeared in the [AFT Voices blog](#).*

I am a proud graduate of the New York State Division of Parole Training Academy, having served as a parole officer for the state since 1993. My academy classmates and I attended 10 weeks of rigorous training. We learned the basics of parole supervision, the proper use of force, various techniques for de-escalating tense situations, and, most importantly, how to handle firearms safely.

I embraced the training so much that I went on to get certified as a police firearms instructor and an evaluator of other instructors. It's a role I can still perform to this day, even as I serve my 12th year as president of the New York State Public Employees Federation, a labor union affiliated with the AFT that represents 60,000 professional, scientific and technical employees.

There is one excellent reason why parole officers in New York State train so much — it saves lives. The consequences of not following the right protocols can lead to injury or even death. Parole officers work every day with people who have histories of violent crimes, and you must be committed to helping them rehabilitate their lives. A comprehensive training program is critical for anyone working in law enforcement.

## ICE ain't all that

Compare that to the “training” received by the 12,000 recruits who have joined U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement during the second Trump administration. For one thing, there's this information from Ryan Schwank, a former ICE lawyer who worked at the federal law enforcement training academy: According to Schwank in the New York Times, [the number of practical exams](#) ICE agents must complete has been reduced from 25 to nine. Yes, nine.

Some of the exams that were eliminated? “Judgment Pistol Shooting” and “Determine Removability,” a reference to how an agent decides if the people they encounter have legal status in the United States.

It is no great leap of logic to conclude that lack of judgment regarding when to use a pistol led directly to this year's killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

In addition, a recent report from the New York Times revealed that, despite receiving \$750 million in additional funding for training, ICE has cut almost 40 percent of its training to “save



A few of President Spence's credentials and certifications earned as a New York State parole officer.

time.” A July 2025 ICE training syllabus shows that recruits received more than 580 hours of training over 72 days. A syllabus from last month reveals just 336 hours over 42 days. That amounts to a 40 percent decrease in training.

Understand this: Time saved does not save lives.

What saves lives are well-trained professionals who know how to react in every situation because they've been drilled by instructors and thoroughly trained to do their dangerous jobs in any scenario they may encounter.

New York State parole officers work every day to keep the parolees they oversee on the road to recovery, so that they can once again become productive members of society. Is it too much to ask that ICE agents receive adequate training so that they, too, can do their jobs without harming people and disrupting communities?



## SUNY Downstate fight the subject of AFT Health Care Q&A with union leaders

---

PEF President Wayne Spence and interim Downstate Regional Field Services Director Deb Egel participated in a question-and-answer feature in the AFT Health Care publication's Spring 2026 issue on the history of the fight to save SUNY Downstate.

Members can read the full article [here](#).

In addition to PEF's leaders, AFT spoke with Redetha Abrahams-Nichols, a nurse at SUNY Downstate for 25 years, and president of United University Professions (UUP) Downstate chapter, and a member of the UUP Executive Board and the AFT Nurses and Health Professionals Program and Policy Council; and Fred Kowal, president of UUP, an AFT vice president, and a member of the New York State United Teachers Board of Directors and Executive Committee and the New York State AFL-CIO Executive Council.

SUNY Downstate was at the center of a yearslong battle to protect access to healthcare in central Brooklyn and is a crucial academic medical center and safety-net hospital that delivers quality care to a primarily Black and Latinx community with disproportionately high rates of chronic illness.

When plans to shut down the hospital were announced in January 2024, unions, area clergy, and community organizations banded together into a powerful coalition and fought back. [Victory came in June 2025](#), when the coalition secured \$1.1 billion to upgrade and expand SUNY Downstate's facilities and services.



# Affordability is an everyday struggle

By **NAJEE WALKER**

From Buffalo to Allegany, April 20-24, members of the PEF Contract Team – led by PEF Vice President and Contract Chair Darlene Williams and Region 1 Coordinator Vincent Cicatello – heard one common message: The cost of living is too damn high.

That's why addressing affordability issues in the next PEF contract is so crucial.

"We have heard PEF members loud and clear," Cicatello said to members at OMH, DOCCS, DOT, DEC, Parks and Recreation and other worksites who came out in high numbers to hear updates from the team. "Salaries are not keeping up with inflation -- including the high cost of groceries, utility bills and gas prices. Many members are experiencing insecurities in being able to pay the bills required to support their families. Some members are telling us that they cannot afford rent, and putting food on their table has become challenging. Other members are seeking assistance and are getting in line at local food pantries."

Among the 24 PEF proposals delivered to the State on the first day of negotiations – Feb. 2, 2026 – was one dealing with Article 7, Compensation.

"We have been to the table with the state many times, but they have not wanted to talk about wages yet," said VP Williams. "We know that many of you are struggling, and we know that 3% just isn't going to cut it."

VP Williams also told members at each stop of the tour that the team is working on negotiating a four-year contract instead of three and is seeking wage increases of "more than 3.9 percent" each year.

"We know that with all the instability in the world, we may need more as time goes on," said VP Williams. "That is why for each year of the contract, we're asking for a percentage increase. We do not want to end our next contract on a lower percentage than where we start."



Health care costs have increased for PEF members by nine percent. The Contract Team noted that in addition to being silent on wages at the negotiating table, the state has tried to push for a change in healthcare, which would revoke access to certain medications, including GLP-1 medication, if it is not used to treat certain conditions laid out by the state. Additionally, the team said the proposal by the state would increase the amount members would pay for using out-of-network providers, which would raise costs for many members, force them to find in-network providers, or force them out of having healthcare coverage overall.

"The members are concerned, and several are facing hardships in being able to support themselves and their family members," said Cicatello. "One anonymous member during the tour said, 'New York State is just disrespecting us,' when talking about the proposed medication increases and seemingly wanting to force us to go in network. Many PEF members are not only upset, but are concerned that they will not be able to afford the cost to care for themselves and their loved ones."

Members across Region 1 spoke candidly about different issues. For members at OMH and DOCCS facilities, safety was one of the central concerns. As violence continues to rise and illegal contraband makes its way into the facilities, members felt that more needs to be done to keep them safe at work. For other members, bullying and retaliation were also top of mind.

“We have been negotiating articles that deal with hazardous duty pay,” said VP Williams. “While this is being negotiated, PEF is committed to working with the legislature to pass more significant changes to DOCCS and O-Agency facilities to help keep our members safe.”

For members at DOH, OMIG, OTDA, WCB, and several other agencies located in the Ellicott Square building in Buffalo, parking was a main concern. Many pay hundreds of dollars for parking, on top of other commuting costs.

The Contract Team also met with members at Roswell Park. They discussed both the main table contract, which applies to all PEF members as well as special provisions for Roswell Park members, including proposals on safety and security at the cancer hospital.

“In the past, we have negotiated Roswell Park contracts separately and after we finished the main contract,” said VP Williams. “It was important for the team, and the PEF members at Roswell Park, that we not do that this time. The members at Roswell Park deserve a fair contract as soon as possible, just like we all do.”

Finally, the Contract Team shared that they are seeking to bring dental coverage under PEF’s control. On the table is a proposal for the union to administer its own dental plan, like CSEA and UUP, which should result in cost savings and more network dentists across the State.

“We’ve heard that some people are fine with the current coverage, but we’ve also heard plenty of members say otherwise,” said VP Williams. “We believe it’s time to take the dental coverage in-house and to figure out how best to serve all members.”

At the end of each meeting, VP Williams came back around to affordability and told members no matter where they live in New York, the reality is the same.

“Coming from Downstate born and raised in Brooklyn and now living on Staten Island, I understand firsthand the challenges our members face in the lower regions,” she said. “However, what this past week has reinforced for me is that regardless of geography, the core issues impacting our members remain the same. Whether you are in the heart of Brooklyn or in Buffalo, affordability is a challenge for all of us.”

*Editor’s Note: The contract team met again with representatives from the State the last three days of April and is scheduling additional bargaining sessions in May. Members can find the latest updates at [www.pef.org/contract](http://www.pef.org/contract).*



# Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

**SIGN NOW!**

# PEF urges DOCCS to address spike in chemical exposures

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Over the years, state employees working inside DOCCS facilities have faced an increase in violent incidents as well as incidents of chemical exposures. Last year, incidents involving chemical exposures and contraband were reported at Clinton, Attica, Fishkill, Five Points, Cape Vincent, Wyoming and Upstate Correctional Facility. Each incident involved unknown substances and drugs introduced through the mail or with drug-saturated paper that upon discovery caused harm to staff.

In 2026, the exposures have continued with alarming frequency, including a major incident at Mohawk Correctional Facility in Rome, N.Y., where a visitor exposed staff to papers saturated with several substances, including cocaine, ketamine and phenyl cyclohexyl piperidine (PCP).

According to a report issued by DOCCS, the number of “unusual incidents” increased by 16 percent between 2015 and 2023. Unusual incidents as defined by the report include accidents, assaults, fire, escapes, and stolen or lost property. The same report shows that over the same period of time, assaults on staff and contraband incidents both increased by 24 percent.

In a letter to DOCCS Commissioner Daniel Martuscello III sent April 9, PEF President Wayne Spence told the commissioner that the time to take action is now.

“While incidents have been occurring in multiple locations for some time, this past week alone saw several serious exposures at Marcy, Mohawk, and Midstate. In these cases, both uniformed officers and civilian staff—including nurses, social workers, and other essential personnel, were exposed to unknown chemical substances requiring medical intervention,” wrote President Spence. “These events are part of a broader pattern affecting many facilities. Employees across all job titles are increasingly fearful for their safety and feel that their lives are being put at risk simply by coming to work.”

PEF Parole Officer, Region 9 Coordinator and Article 18 Health and Safety Co-Chair Gabriela Franklyn works closely with others who are at risk of drug exposure inside DOCCS facilities. She said that members are increasingly using workers’ compensation due to medical injuries.

“Sadly, it is not uncommon to hear: ‘My job is going to kill me,’ or ‘I fear for my safety at work,’ or ‘I fear retaliation if I speak out,’” said Franklyn. “Especially from our health care providers, vocational counselors and teachers.”



**Contraband Detection**



**Chemical Exposure Prevention**



**Staff Safety**



**Stronger Facilities**

In his letter, President Spence offered suggestions to the commissioner, including introducing trained canine units to assist with visitor searches.

“A clear and repeated message we’ve heard is that one of the most effective deterrents to contraband is the presence of trained canine units,” wrote President Spence. “The mere presence of having dogs on site for visits and for random searches within the facility significantly deters and reduces the likelihood of illicit substances entering by any means and being used throughout the facilities.”

In closing, President Spence urged the commissioner to act before it is too late.

“Given the urgency and the systemwide nature of this threat, we are requesting immediate, visible action to protect all staff—uniformed and civilian alike—as well as the incarcerated individuals and their families who visit our facilities,” he wrote. “We urge swift action to prevent further harm.”



## Sign up **TODAY** for the Communicator

Keeping PEF members current on PEF news, emailed to you monthly. Make sure we have your personal email address. PEF will never email at your work address.

**Sign up at**  
**[www.pef.org/emailme](http://www.pef.org/emailme)**

# THANK YOU NURSES

National Nurses Week

## Celebrating the dedicated nurses within our union

By **KATE STICKLES**

For National Nurses Month in May, we spoke to several of the nurses on the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee (SWNC) about why they entered the profession and why they stepped up to represent and advocate for their fellow nurses as union leaders. Here's what they had to say!

### **Vincent Cicatello, Buffalo Psychiatric Center**



Statewide Nurses Committee (SWNC) Chair Vincent Cicatello went into nursing in Buffalo after the birth of his first child, Vincent Cicatello Jr., who was diagnosed with a severe illness called Severe Combined Immunodeficiency Syndrome (SCIDS).

"My son was very sick, and it took months after he was born before he was diagnosed," Cicatello said. "I was influenced by the nurses at Buffalo

Children's Hospital, Duke University and eventually Memorial Sloan Kettering, as all his nurses were top-notch clinicians who always put our entire family at ease during several very difficult times.

"Regardless of if Vincent Jr. was getting a bone marrow transplant (four times), getting IVIG infusions, or going for general follow up and lab work, we felt the nurses were extremely supportive," he said. "My son just loved all the nurses for their kindness and for the excellent care they provided him. The nurses have kept him alive and have made his life better for almost 30 years now."

Serving on the SWNC is an honor, he said.

"When I was asked if I was interested in joining the SWNC by President Spence, I was very proud to be recognized as someone who could contribute to both the nursing profession and also to be in a position to serve and to advocate for the almost 10,000 statewide nurses including many nurses in the Region 1/Western New York area," Cicatello said. "Collaborating with Debbie Egel, Nora Higgins, SWNC Chair Amy Pacholk and the committee has been one of the highlights of my PEF membership."

The SWNC focuses on improving the work/life balance of PEF nurses and looks at various issues, including health and safety in the workplace, scheduling concerns, and the wellbeing of nurses.

"Many nurses, whom we may not even know, will reach out and share their concerns and often seek advice from various committee members," he said. "One of the most important functions of the SWNC is the annual Nurses Lobby Day in Albany. Attending lobby day allows us to discuss the concerns of nurses and healthcare workers of the Public Employees Federation with state senators and assembly members. We encourage and work with legislators to help push our agenda, which can improve worksites for both PEF nurses as well as the several agencies we represent."

### **Amy Pacholk, SUNY Stony Brook**



It was a winding path to nursing for SWNC Chair Amy Pacholk.

"As Bob Ross would say, 'It was a happy little accident,'" she said. "My background was in political science and international development. I was always interested in advocating for health and education. I have always thought: If you do not have your health, you do not have anything; and knowledge is power."

Pacholk spent time working in Europe and Africa but was increasingly drawn to health-related socioeconomic dynamics and their implications, she said. Her original intent was to return stateside to get a Master's in Public Health – but Hurricane Katrina had other plans, shutting down New Orleans where she planned to study.

"I decided to take science classes at Suffolk County Community College to enhance my understanding of the building blocks of health until I finally went to New Orleans to study," she said. "I was surrounded by people at Suffolk who were pursuing degrees in medicine, nursing, physical therapy and occupational therapy. I always believed in advocacy and helping people, and with the strong encouragement of a few classmates, I applied to Stony Brook University's one-year intensive RN program."

She was accepted and the rest, as they say, is history.

"I have spent my time working as a surgical, trauma, and neurosurgical ICU nurse ever since," she said. Since entering the profession, Pacholk has gone on to become a Master's prepared nurse, practiced independently, lectured on neuro trauma, and taught nursing at several universities and colleges.

During the COVID pandemic, Pacholk became a national advocate for personal protective equipment (PPE) and exposed the national shortage on MSNBC's 11th Hour with Brian Williams. She went on to work with new agencies across the world to discuss bedside dynamics and caring for COVID patients.

President Spence asked her to join the SWNC to continue her advocacy.

"I think that the nurses who work for NYS deal with significant challenges that are unique to public employees," she said. "Often when people think of a nurse, they think of someone like me who works in a hospital. What is unique and special

about the nurses we represent in PEF is that we take care of every population in just about every situation: in hospitals, jails, psychiatric hospitals, veterans' facilities, nursing homes, children's homes, facilities for the disabled, substance abuse facilities, and more. Nursing is a dynamic profession and we experience and advocate for all of the intricacies of it and the people we serve and care for on the SWNC."

### **Jeffrey Taylor, Clinton Correctional Facility**

SWNC member Jeffrey Taylor, from Region 7, credits family for leading him to a career in nursing.

"I entered the nursing profession through the encouragement of my wife, my aunt, and my uncle," he said. "I was working construction when I lost my job due to an economic downturn. My aunt and uncle were in the medical profession as nurse anesthetists. My wife was an operating room nurse, and I helped her study when we were dating."

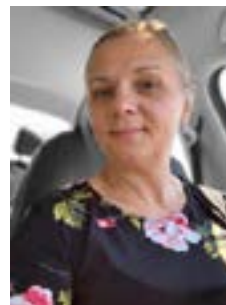
Having recently purchased a home and with a baby on the way, instability in the construction industry spurred him into action – and into nursing.

"I am so grateful for the opportunities that have now been available to my family and I with this decision," Taylor said.

He decided to join the SWNC to advocate for his colleagues.

"I have always tried to communicate issues within our profession to help with the ever-changing needs within our ever-changing environment and challenges," he said. "I am very grateful to work alongside such an exceptional group of nurses."

### **Dorothy Faulkner, Corrections Central Office**



Working as a secretary on a pulmonary unit, Dorothy Faulkner from Region 8 saw the care and compassion of the nurses around her and was inspired to enter the nursing profession to do the same.

"I observed how the nurses not only took care of the patients but the families also," she said. "I watched as a family sat bedside with a family member declining but kept a comfortable distance, and the nurse walked in and said, 'You can move closer, hold his hand, talk to him, he can hear you.' I was in such awe that she knew to do that and the comfort it brought to the family."

Faulkner wanted to help people as far back as she can remember.

"The role of caretaker has always been something that brought me joy from a very young age," she said. "I observed sickly patients come in to be taken care of and independently walk out upon discharge feeling better. I wanted to learn the best way to do that."

Joining the SWNC, Faulkner can now lift up and support not just patients, but fellow nurses.

“Nurses work so hard caring for everyone and sometimes don’t have a voice to speak for themselves,” she said. “I didn’t know how unions could assist or the opportunities they have to assist in situations where nurses aren’t being treated fairly. I wanted to educate myself and help.”

### **Cynthia Walker, SUNY Downstate**



In Region 11, Cynthia Walker credits nurses caring for her mother, a cancer survivor, at Buffalo General Medical Center for her entrance into the profession.

“The care my mother received by the nurses was phenomenal and inspired me to become a registered nurse,” she said.

Walker spent several years working in a medical-surgical unit on Long Island, before she was hired in her own community at SUNY Downstate in the cardiac/telemetry/stepdown unit.

“I was impressed by the dedication and determination of my coworkers in the way they cared for patients and the fast-paced, high acuity atmosphere,” she said. “Many of the employees had families and were continuing their education, inspiring me to go back to school for my bachelor’s degree.”

Walker recognized the power of the union to effect change for nurses and was soon involved on multiple levels, as chair of the Clinical Staffing Committee (required by NYS law) at SUNY Downstate and as a member of the PEF Contract Team.

“Being involved in the union gives me a voice to advocate for the conditions that state employees are experiencing in the institutions,” she said. “By addressing these concerns, our approach is to enhance the health care setting with better working conditions and comparative salaries in an effort to attract new graduate RNs.”

She was an active participant in the fight to save SUNY Downstate and is a member of the Clinical Leadership Team for the “Re-Imagine” SUNY Downstate restructuring and renovations. Walker is also newly elected as Council Leader at Downstate.

“Along with a robust Division Council, we are driving the importance of member engagement, advocating for better healthcare outcomes, work-life balance, and we are united for a contract state workers deserve,” she said.



A lot of specific titles  
celebrate Recognition Weeks  
this month, and we tip our  
PEF hat to all of them!



Nurses



EMS &  
Firefighters



Teachers



Mental Health  
Professionals



Correction  
Officers

The work of ALL public servants is not easy. It demands sacrifice, resilience, and strength. Yet PEF members continue to serve—during emergencies, long nights, moments of crisis, and everyday challenges—because you believe in the people and places you protect.

---

**THANK YOU** for your service.

**THANK YOU** for your commitment.

**THANK YOU** for making a difference—every day.

---

# WOMEN'S Herstory = MONTH =

## Women leading the way: committee growth, pay equity, labor history, and social justice

By **MICHELLE ROSELLO, CHAIR**

In the words of the great John “Hannibal” Smith, the leader of the fictional A-Team, “I love it when a plan comes together!” I trust that you all enjoyed the celebrations of a powerful and productive Women’s “Herstory” month in March. For the Statewide Women’s Committee, March 2026 marked the successful achievement and execution of key goals.

### Revitalizing and forming committees

I am beyond excited to report that the Region 1 and Region 5 committees met and began planning events for members. After the initial meeting at the end of January with the Statewide Committee members who expressed interest in activating/reactivating women’s committees in their regions, I received an email in March from Leslie Apacible, a Statewide Women’s Committee member and Council Leader of Division 399 (OTDA), who reached out to notify me that she was holding the first Region 5 Women’s Committee Meet and Greet on March 23. It was an honor to be asked to attend virtually as a guest speaker.

Subsequently, I contacted Kayla Mootry, a fellow Statewide Women’s Committee member and a training specialist at Buffalo Psychiatric Center, who had previously expressed interest in establishing a committee in her region. I am pleased to report that Ms. Mootry held the inaugural Region 1 Women’s Committee meeting at the regional office in Buffalo on April 7. Unfortunately, I was not available to attend that first meeting virtually, but I was there in spirit! Congratulations to Leslie and Kayla, as well as their Regional Coordinators and the participating members who attended each meeting, for their efforts and collaboration.

Don’t worry if you missed the first meetings, more are scheduled for June, and you can reach out to Leslie at [Leslie.apacible@pef](mailto:Leslie.apacible@pef).

[org](#) and Kayla at [mootry0824@yahoo.com](mailto:mootry0824@yahoo.com) for more information on how to get involved.

### Black women in labor history

At the beginning of March, the Assistant Downstate Co-Chair Alison Rissing and I attended Dr. Danielle Phillips Cunningham’s book talk at Rutgers Labor Education Center on Nannie Helen Burroughs and other Black women union organizers. Burroughs was an educator, orator, religious leader, civil rights activist, feminist, and businesswoman who fought for equal rights as well as opportunities for women beyond the duties of domestic housework.

The presentation emphasized the impact of Black women in labor history and union leadership, explored differences between white and Black feminists, and featured a panel of Black women authors and educators who shared insights into women’s studies, labor history, union leadership, and Black culture.

The Statewide Women’s Committee is excited to work with PEF’s Black Caucus of Professional, Scientific, and Technical members to further explore and discuss cultural and labor issues alongside panelist Dr. Chrystal Moulton, Associate Director of Collections at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a division of the New York Public Library.

Make sure your membership information with the Black Caucus is current, so you receive the latest updates. If you need to update your contact information, reach out to Gwendolyn Culpepper Stevenson at [GCulpepper@pef.org](mailto:GCulpepper@pef.org) with the subject line “Update Membership.”

## **Pay equity in Queens**

In recognition of Women's History month, I was invited by the Office of the Borough President in Queens to participate with other female community leaders in a formal discussion to explore the current state of pay equity for women in Queens with Deputy Borough President Ebony Young.

During a one-on-one meeting with Young in February, we examined the ongoing issue where discussions about inequity happen frequently but rarely lead to lasting solutions, structured follow-up, or implementation. Drawing from her experience working on a project in Greenland, Deputy Borough President Young organized intentional, facilitated conversations with culturally specific groups, using carefully crafted questions to address obstacles to pay equity, cultural and power dynamics, safety, voice, and opportunities for advancement.

The Pay Equity Roundtable that I was invited to was held in March at the 82nd Street Academics in Jackson Heights and included Hispanic women leaders from Queens, who fielded questions covering topics such as the wage gap, occupational segregation, pay transparency, and employer accountability. Although we didn't discuss every question, the session was lively, informative, and filled with laughter and meaningful exchanges about the needs and experiences of Hispanic women. I am excited about the next phases of this initiative and will provide updates moving forward.

## **Commission on the Status of Women**

It was great to reconnect with the women union leaders from around the world who attended the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as delegates who were tasked with engaging in UN policy debates and dialogue sessions.

The CWS is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This year's reception was held by AFT President Randi Weingarten with delegates from Education International and Public Service International. Unfortunately, I could not attend this year as a delegate because I was racing the Ironman 70.3 Triathlon in Little Elm, Texas. (Yes, I finished!)

## **Supporting tradeswomen**

In keeping with the spirit of solidarity and support of fellow union sisters, I had the pleasure of supporting my sisters in the trade unions at the NYC Tradeswomen DeWalt Takeover in Towson, Maryland. The event brought together more than 200 inspiring tradeswomen from seven different states to close out Women in Construction week and Women's History month. It was more than a gathering — it was a reminder of the strength, unity and opportunity within union trades.

The event was co-organized by Nikosa Barrett from NYC Tradeswoman Meet Up and my Tradeswoman sister Thelma-Louis Fernandez, a Career Tech Education Instructor and Executive Board Member of Sheet Metal Workers Local Union No. 28, who was honored earlier in the week at the Labor Press Women in Labor Awards, along with PEF Membership Benefits Administrator Stephane McLean-Beathley.

What started as a response to women feeling isolated in the trades has grown into a powerful movement rooted in connection, mentorship and opportunity. I was honored to participate. I am also happy to report that I have been invited to speak at a panel discussion that will be held next month in New York City sponsored by the New York City Tradeswomen Meet Up. Please refer to this flyer for more information about the program.

## **Red Carpet for Social Justice**

Lastly, it warms my heart to be able to report about a social justice event that members of the PEF Hispanic Committee and myself were able to financially collaborate, support and participate in called the Red Carpet for Social Justice. In honor of International Women's Month, sisters from New York unions and community organizations hosted the Red Carpet for Social Justice at DC 37 Headquarters – The Terrace on Barclay in New York City.

This year's theme, "Give to Gain — When Women Rise, We All Thrive," reflected the shared commitment to women's leadership, equity, and community empowerment. The Red Carpet for Social Justice, founded by 1199SEIU and now supported by more than 40 unions, community groups, and social justice organizations, has become a signature space for celebrating women's voices, cultures, and contributions to the labor movement.

In 2024, the coalition's persistent advocacy achieved a major statewide milestone: International Women's Day was officially recognized as a commemorative holiday in New York. Building on this victory, the coalition continues to advocate for the day to become a paid holiday statewide.

We were invited to walk the red carpet as representatives of our native countries, each highlighting a specific social justice issue. Vivian Falto represented Puerto Rico, focusing on Diversity & Equity in the Workplace and Language Justice. Leticia Rivera represented the Dominican Republic, advocating for Worker Rights and Labor Justice. I represented Panama, addressing Workplace Violence. Altogether, 21 women participated, showcasing the diverse nations that form the coalition.

Just two and a half weeks after this year's event, the coalition mourned the passing of its founder, Sister Minerva Solas, who led the Red Carpet for Social Justice Coalition. For nearly 60 years, she dedicated herself to organizing health care workers, strengthening communities, and championing dignity and respect for working people.

Minerva inspired leaders and was relentless in her pursuit of social justice. I feel privileged to have worked alongside her in the coalition and to have celebrated together at the March event. She was powerful, steadfast, and unwavering in her commitment to what was right. Her impact will endure within the coalition and among all those whose lives she touched throughout her remarkable career.





# Coming together for a member in need

Solidarity. Unity. We are Stronger Together.

These are common union rallying cries – but they are true in more than just advocacy, workplace protections, and contracts.

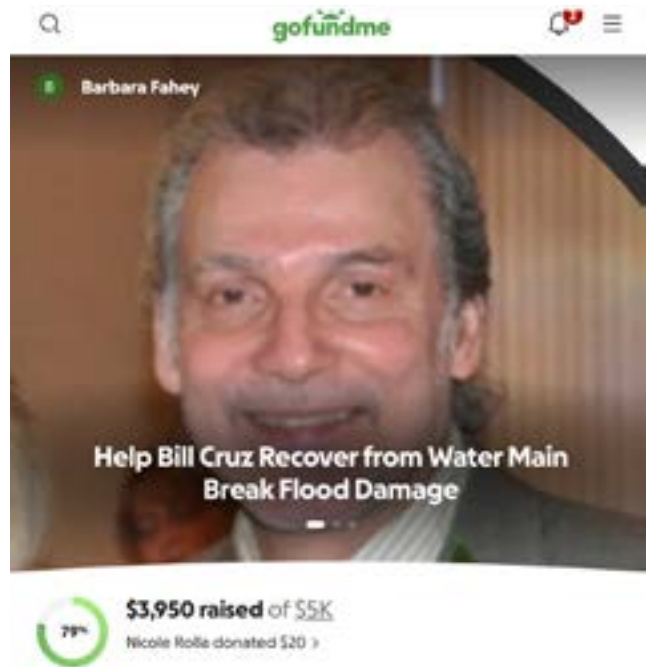
On February 2, a water main break in New York City caused devastating flooding that destroyed PEF member Bill Cruz's basement, including irreplaceable personal items, important documents, and leaving him without heat.

"Bill has lived a life of service to others," said PEF Executive Board Member Barbara Fahey, who set up a [GoFundMe](#) to help. "Throughout his state career, Bill has been a friend and advocate for our members, our agency, his community and our country."

Cruz has spent more than 50 years working for the federal, state, and local government, as well as his country in the military. His PEF roles are many and varied, from Labor/Management, health and safety, council leader, steward, a member of the Affirmative Action Committee, the Contract Team, and several other committees.

"Now, Bill needs our help," she said. "The funds will go directly toward cleanup, repairs to his home, and replacing the major appliances and equipment lost in the flood. This is our chance to give back to someone who has given so much of himself."

— Kate Stuckles





# North Country leaders gather for annual conference

Region 6 Coordinator Christopher Dunham and Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky brought leaders from their Regions together the first weekend in May for the annual Leadership Weekend in Clayton, New York.

Discussions and workshops focused on health and safety, membership benefits, legislative advocacy through COPE contributions, organizing and the importance of mapping worksites, an overview of the PEF mobile app, as well as a breakout session on challenges facing DOCCS members.

## **COPE and federal lobbying**

PEF union dues can't be used for federal lobbying efforts, but many PEF members' jobs are tied to federal funding, making COPE contributions critically important.

"If nothing is done, seven years from now there will be an automatic reduction in everyone's Social Security of approximately 23%," said COPE Coordinator Don Morgenstern. "What we hope to get really amounts to a cup of coffee per paycheck. Help us fight for you in Washington."

VP Randi DiAntonio encouraged leaders in the room to talk about COPE.

"If we're not asking people, no one's going to participate," she said. "The one thing that makes a difference when we talk to members is that somebody asked them. You are on the front lines."

You can contribute to COPE or change your contribution amount [here](#).



## **Committees are key**

Health and Safety Director Josh Kemp and specialist Jazmine Nova-Morales outlined the ins and out of the Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) provisions, a New York state program that is overseen by OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

"There are 22 states that do not have state programs," Kemp said. "It took 10 years of union advocacy to get it in New York. It's something we have to hold on to and continue to advocate for and strengthen."

Health and safety committees at the local, agency, and statewide level are the union's opportunity to effect real changes for employees across the state. When something occurs in the workplace – from a chemical spill to bad ventilation to an exposure – committees make a difference.

"How do we prevent it from happening again?" Kemp said. "That's a really great question for committees to ask and get management thinking that way as well."

Visit PEF Health and Safety online [here](#).

### DOCCS breakout

One of the breakout meetings brought together DOCCS members from across the two regions to discuss issues around health and safety and exposures. Field representatives and local leaders say members report that they frequently smell drugs at work.

"After Mohawk (Correctional Facility) had multiple officers exposed, PESH did go out and one of the things that we got feedback on is almost everyone they spoke to felt like having canine units at the facilities would be a good deterrent," said VP DiAntonio, adding while canines can't smell all illicit substances, their mere presence can sometimes be enough to prevent someone bringing them in.

PEF President Wayne Spence has written to DOCCS Commissioner Daniel Martuscello III urging him to deploy canine units.

Participants also raised the issue of visitors and how there does not need to be a known relationship between the person visiting and the incarcerated individual, so anyone with identification is able to enter. Yet, staff need a gate pass to enter another facility.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is the lowest bar on the safety ladder, yet that is what DOCCS provides. One participant said if she opens mail with gloves on but puts it down on her desk – now the desk is contaminated. Cross contamination is so high that current measures aren't enough.

PEF leaders need input from DOCCS members to fully understand and advocate for appropriate change. President Spence has invited DOCCS leaders to Albany on June 12 for a one-day meeting to further strategize about how to improve working conditions.

### All aboard!

After a full day of workshops and presentations, members enjoyed an Uncle Sam's boat tour of the Thousand Islands. The voyage took them down the St. Lawrence River and under the bridge that connects the U.S. and Canada, with views of [Boldt Castle](#) and the vacation homes that line the waterfront.





# PEF members play key role at Division of Human Rights

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The New York State Division of Human Rights (DHR) is dedicated to protecting and enforcing the civil and human rights of New Yorkers through New York’s Human Rights laws. The state passed its first version of the New York Human Rights Law in 1945, known then as the Law Against Discrimination. Since 1968, when DHR was created, employees of the division have been tasked with investigating complaints of discrimination and enforcing the law when necessary.

The agency is spread across 13 units, ranging from units responsible for tracking reports of discrimination, to units responsible for prosecution and enforcement. Albert Jacobs III is the Director of Investigations for the Division-Initiated Action Unit (DIAU). He has been with DHR and a PEF member for 18 years—since 2008—working in the DIAU for the last 10 years. The DIAU investigates discrimination complaints statewide. They file complaints on behalf of DHR and the state. Investigating high impact cases or cases involving systemic discrimination is the unit’s top priority.

“Our unit is based in the Bronx, but allegations can come to our unit from anywhere in New York,” said Jacobs. “This is a tip and referral unit. We receive tips from members of the public, regional offices, legislators and even the Governor’s office.”

New Yorkers who feel they’ve been discriminated against in employment, housing, public accommodation, education, credit and other areas can go to DHR and file an individual complaint form. The complaint is then assigned to one of 12 regional offices where an investigation will collect evidence and look for probable cause. Jacobs said that this process is slightly different for his unit.

“When we receive a tip or referral to begin an investigation from any of the offices, if it is alleged to have taken place in New York and it appears to be systemic, our unit opens an investigation to see what is going on,” said Jacobs. “We look for potential violations of the human rights laws through requests for information, interviews and other evidence collecting.”

DHR has about 300 staff members. The DIAU has six full-time staff members responsible for investigating complaints across the state. That is four more than the unit had when Jacobs first joined the team.



The DIAU has helped bring several cases of education discrimination, housing discrimination, disability discrimination, and other human rights law violations. In 2024, through the work of DHR and Jacobs’ unit, the state was able to successfully resolve a complaint filed against the Gouverneur Central School District and First Student Inc., the largest school bus operator in the nation, following an allegation of racial harassment and assault of a 10-year-old student. In addition to revised policies, compliance reviews and semi-annual reports, the school district and bus operator had to pay a \$42,000 penalty to the State of New York.

“When we get cases that go up against powerful companies, they often bring talented, multinational lawyers and law firms against us,” said Jacobs. “I think that for our small team and for DHR to be able to successfully make our case and secure judgements in favor of the people of New York is pretty incredible.”

Jacobs said that the work done by his team is important now more than ever. As New Yorkers face more attacks on their civil and human rights, Jacobs believes that millions of New Yorkers need an agency like DHR.

“New York has by far the most robust Human Rights Law,” said Jacobs. “The protections it affords and the work we’re able to do because we enforce those protections are so vital at a time when civil rights are being stripped away. Our staff are committed to making sure we take care of each New Yorker.”





PEF Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger, left, joins elected officials and others to cut the ribbon opening the new testing facility on May 6, 2026.

# New Civil Service testing facility in Capital Region opens in Cohoes

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The New York State Department of Civil Service (DCS) unveiled a computer-based testing center on May 6. The new examination center is 1 of 12 planned centers to be opened across New York State. Located in downtown Cohoes, N.Y., DCS will begin holding examinations at the new location immediately.

“The Cohoes computer-based testing center is a great start as New York implements what PEF has long demanded - modernization that allows for efficient, accessible and convenient ways for qualified candidates to enter or remain in the State’s civil service system,” said PEF President Wayne Spence in a [press release about the opening sent out by DCS](#). “We believe a robust civil service system rooted in the merit and fitness of candidates is critical to maintaining a state workforce and protecting it from favoritism and political patronage. PEF thanks Commissioner Hogues and Governor Hochul for their efforts, and looks forward to the other 11 centers coming online soon.”

The new computer-based examination center replaces the old model of civil service exams, which brought job seekers to schools across the region to take written paper exams. While the system has been in place for decades, the complaints of uncomfortable seats, lack of temperature control, and inconvenient scheduling led DCS to look into bringing the process into the 21st century.

“This center will make a difference in the lives of State workers looking to advance their careers,” said DCS Commissioner Timothy Hogues. “Computer-based testing provides modern and convenient access to taking promotion examinations.”

Commissioner Hogues credited PEF and President Wayne Spence with advocating for upgrades for test takers to have the best accommodations possible.

“I really appreciate the conversations we’ve had with PEF President Spence,” said Commissioner Hogues. “And as these centers open across the state, civil service promotion exams will be offered more frequently, (and) more efficiently.”

In addition to brightly colored blue-green walls and carpeting—as opposed to the “government beige” that Commissioner Hogues recalled—the center offers three classrooms capable of fitting up to 150 test takers, as well as several reasonable accommodation rooms for those who need it. Additionally, the center also offers a lactation room, for testers who may be breastfeeding at the time of examination.

At the ribbon cutting ceremony, members of the legislature championed the new center, calling it a pathway to advancement.

“Today, with the opening of this new computer-based test center here in Cohoes, we are not simply cutting a ribbon. We are opening the door for people to come in,” said New York State Senator Robert Jackson. “A door to opportunity, a door the advancement, a door to a modern, accessible and fair civil service system for the people who serve our state and who hope to serve.”

Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer Amato echoed Senator Jackson’s sentiments but acknowledged that this process took time, care and money.

“We fought for the money to get here and to open up opportunities, and I am proud to be here today,” said Assemblymember Pheffer Amato. “This is the start of many more opportunities that we’re bringing to this state together.

Jobs and careers in government are fabulous. We’re living proof of that and we have to get that next generation here.”

Assemblymember John McDonald recalled his father—a 43-year PEF member—often taking advancement tests. He said that access is critical to ensuring that things move quickly and that every generation looking to work in the public sector has a chance.

“There’s different generations of people in the workforce and all have the opportunity for advancement,” said Assemblymember McDonald. “We need to make sure that the tools of the trade reflect the needs of the people who are taking these exams.”





PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio, Comptroller DiNapoli, and PEF President Wayne Spence chat on stage during a roundtable discussion at the PEF Convention in Lake Placid in October 2025.

## A Q&A with New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli

### **Where did you begin your public service? And why did you get involved?**

I won my first election when I was 18. I served on my local school board, becoming the first 18-year-old in New York to hold public office. My friends and I wanted to be at the table and have a say in the decisions that were being made. I was going to college locally, so I ran, knocked on a lot of doors and won. It was the start of my journey in public service.

### **What first attracted you to wanting to become the state's chief fiduciary officer?**

The State Comptroller's office oversees so many big issues for the state and the people of New York. The challenge of wearing many hats and being the state's watchdog, accountant, fiduciary of the pension fund, manager of the retirement system and so much more appealed to me. As an Assemblymember, I had worked with the office and had great respect for the staff and the office's mission. I jumped at the chance to lead it, and it is hands down the best job in Albany. I've worked hard and always remembered that I'm doing this for everyday New Yorkers who need a say in government. There's so much more to do, and I'm just as energized about being State Comptroller as I was day one.

### **What is the biggest challenge of your job?**

Managing the state's nearly \$300 billion state pension fund is a big job. I have 1.2 million people who depend on it, and it's personal to me to make sure that it is managed well and grows. I have navigated the state pension fund through the Great Recession, when our value sharply dropped, through the challenges of COVID and now great economic uncertainty around the world. I am proud that the state pension fund has doubled in size since I became State Comptroller.



TWU International President John Samuelson, his spouse Lisa Samuelson, SEIU President April Verrett, and Comptroller DiNapoli were guests at the 2025 PEF Convention in Lake Placid.

I've also expanded the programs to invest in New York-based companies, and affordable and workforce housing, as well as helping local, small businesses secure loans and expand.

We also go after corporations that we invest in that allow employees to be sexually assaulted and harassed, that pay their executives massive pay packages, that use AI as an excuse to layoff workers, and that pollute our environment. AI and how corporations are using it and how it impacts the workforce is a big issue for us.

**At a \$290 billion total value, the New York State and Local Employees Pension fund is one of the largest in the world. How does that benefit New York’s taxpayers?**

We pay out nearly \$17 billion annually in benefits and about 79 percent of our retirees stay in New York. Our state retirees make huge contributions to their local economies and keep many of our rural areas vibrant and strong.

**Our readers want to know one thing from the man that manages \$290 billion: What’s the next great investment opportunity?**

As the State Comptroller, I am not a day trader but one of the most important things that you can do is diversify to protect your investments. The state pension fund has a diverse portfolio heavily weighted towards stocks and bonds and a wide range of industries. Don’t put your eggs all in one basket.

**In addition to being the state’s chief financial officer, you are also an employer with a unionized workforce. How do you view the relationship between you and the union staff that work for you?**

Our office has 2,800 employees. Much of our staff is represented by PEF. They worked hard to advance their careers, and we could not get our work done without them. I personally meet with our PEF labor representatives regularly and we discuss in detail the issues that we need to address to help our workforce succeed and grow professionally. I am a big supporter of unions, grew up in a union household and I make sure that my office is leading by example.

**It seems like there are always controversies about certain investment holdings in the state retirement fund – fossil fuels, firearms manufacturers, artificial intelligence developers – to name a few. What is your investment strategy? How does it work? And how do you leverage your role and your position as an investor in addressing concerns like questionable business practices, excessive executive compensation packages, and problematic environmental concerns with individual companies?**

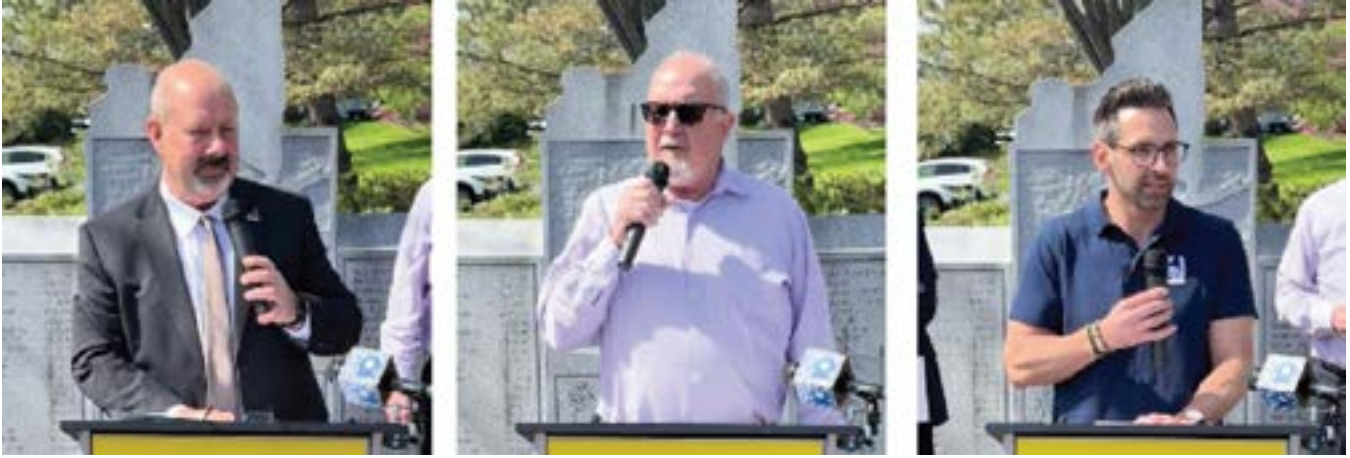
Investment decisions are guided by fiduciary duty, not politics or the latest controversy. Divestment is always a last resort for our fund. We are investors and want to make money. My foremost responsibility is to the men and women who are part of the pension system and are promised a measure of retirement security from it. But we do try to change corporate behavior.

Here is an example. We urged investors in Tesla to reject Elon Musk’s bloated trillion-dollar pay package and vote against directors that were up for reelection. The pay proposal handed him another massive fortune while severely watering down the holdings of every other shareholder. Musk has proven to be distracted by his many outside ventures, and it’s unclear how many more billions of dollars will change that.

**If you could have one “do over,” what would it be? And it does not need to be investment related!**

We all have many do-overs, but sometimes the best things happen when you don’t plan them. We grow from taking chances and making mistakes. I’d tell my younger self to travel more. See the world and experience different cultures and don’t assume you’ll have time someday.

*Editor’s note: DiNapoli is endorsed by PEF in the June 23, 2026, primary election for Comptroller.*



# Workers Memorial Day highlights past promises and ongoing goals around safety at work

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Every year, unions across the country gather to remember and honor those who died, fell ill or became injured on the job on Workers' Memorial Day. PEF each year gathers in front of the 9/11 memorial at PEF Headquarters to observe the memory of those who have fallen, and recommit to remaining vigilant so that harm does not come to working people at their workplace.

"In 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) went into effect promising every worker the right to a safe job and working conditions," said PEF Vice President Bruce Giddings at this year's ceremony on April 28. "Unions continue to draw attention to work-related deaths, diseases and injuries and organize around safer working conditions."

Giddings recognized the hard work unions like PEF have done to ensure that more lives are saved in the workplace than lost. Yet he also acknowledged that the work is not done.

"Each day thousands of workers are killed and millions more suffer injuries and illnesses on the job," he said. "The Public Employees Federation is focused on stopping workplace violence and protecting our members. We must never forget their sacrifices, and we must continue to press for safety in the workplace."

Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue agreed with VP Giddings sentiments, adding that too many PEF members are experiencing dangerous working conditions that should not exist in facilities across New York, especially in DOCCS facilities.

"It feels like every other day we hear about dangerous exposures in our DOCCS facilities," said Secretary-Treasurer Donahue. "We hear about violence in our O-Agencies, inside OMH Psychiatric Centers, inside the Office of Children and Family Services secure facilities, where members work knowing the risk but still show up with dedication and professionalism."

Donahue praised PEF nurses for showing up in Albany at the Capitol to share stories of their experiences working with low staffing, burnout and other dangers that they and their patients face every day.

"These are not isolated incidents. These are warning signs and they demand action," he said. "As members of the labor movement, our work does not stop here. We fight for health and safety, for dignity, for justice on the job and that continues every day."

PEF Health and Safety Director Josh Kemp took a moment to reflect at the 125-year history of workers fighting for their right to be safe at their workplace and refusing to accept that injury or death on the job is the cost of going to work. He shared stories from 1892 and 1911 where workers fought back against industrial companies that endangered their lives, ultimately winning safer workplaces and furthering the labor movement.

These and other incidents eventually pushed President Richard Nixon to sign OSHA into law, but public sector employees in New York still had a fight on their hands.

“Public employees in New York State had to wait another decade. It took 10 more years of union advocacy for New York to pass the Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) Act in 1980,” said Kemp. “This is the law that protects every one of our members today and it was not handed to us. Make no mistake, it was won.”

Kemp emphasized that despite OSHA and PESH, unions still have to do the work of advocating for safer conditions, just as those who came before did. He reaffirmed PEF’s commitment to health and safety, training, and fighting for members who deserve better conditions.

“The people who died at Homestead, at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, on September 11, and the workers across the state and in this country—they are the reason we are here,” he said. “We owe them more than just a moment of silence. We owe them a movement that will never quit.”



# Scholarship, incentive program for STEM

---

Applications for the 2026–27 [NYS Masters in Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship](#) and the [NYS Math and Science Teaching Incentive Program](#) are now open, aimed at supporting aspiring educators—especially math and science teachers—who are stepping up to fill critical workforce shortages and shape the next generation.

## Program Requirements

• **NYS Masters in Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship:** Students must be enrolled in a master’s degree program for public elementary or secondary school teacher certification. Students also need to maintain a minimum GPA and commit to teaching in a NYS public school for a set period after graduation.

• **NYS Math and Science Teaching Incentive Program:**

Students must be (undergraduate or graduate) pursuing an approved secondary-level math or science teacher certification. Recipients must agree to teach math or science in a NYS secondary school for a specified time after earning their degree.

Applications close on June 1, 2026. Review the full requirements for each program and apply at [hesc.ny.gov](https://hesc.ny.gov).

# Somos Albany: Building coalitions with union leaders, elected officials, and community advocates



By **KATE STICKLES**

Union activists descended on Albany from April 17 to 19 for the Somos New York 2026 Conference, attending legislative workshops, touring expo booths, and taking part in panel discussions and gala events.

“Somos Albany has served for 40 years as a premier annual gathering of Latino leaders, elected officials and community advocates that shape policy and promote economic and civic advancement of Latino communities and workers,” said PEF Hispanic Committee Co-Chair Vivian Falto. “PEF’s presence is pivotal in building coalitions with elected officials and community advocates in the pursuit of our goals of social justice and better working conditions for public workers, our members and our union family.

“The Hispanic Committee is a vehicle to highlight the needs of all of our members, while highlighting what is germane to Latinos in the workforce,” said Falto, who works at the State Education Department in Queens. “The needs of one are the needs of all -- like fixing Tier 6, ensuring safety in the workplace, ensuring funding for cultural education, and working to keep communities and schools safe from ICE, to name a few.”

Labor leaders and elected officials, including Gov. Kathy Hochul, Attorney General Letitia James, and State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, packed the Governor’s Ballroom for the annual labor breakfast on April 18.

Hochul touted minimum wage increases tied to inflation, paying off the \$7 billion unemployment insurance fund debt, and Tier 6 reforms as wins for working people.

“Nobody’s been listening for a long time on Tier 6 until I showed up on this,” she said. “We changed the way the benefit is determined. We shortened the vesting period. Guess what? We’re going to do even more this year.”

That’s good news because union leaders in the room had a lot to say about Tier 6, some of which was highlighted during a panel discussion moderated by Assemblyman Jonathan Rivera with panelists including PEF Vice President and Statewide Political Action Committee Chair Randi DiAntonio.

“Why do we need to fix Tier 6? Because it sucks and it’s broken,” she said to applause. “We are experiencing recruitment and

retention problems that are related to Tier 6. We cannot keep our workforce. Last year, the state spent \$1.6 billion on overtime. Our members and their fellow state employees worked over 24 million hours of overtime. Why? Because we can’t keep people. And without adequate staff, the critical services that New Yorkers rely on will be negatively impacted.”

Approximately 66% of PEF members are now in Tiers 5 and 6.

“The pension used to be an equalizer,” VP DiAntonio said. “It used to be what brought us into state service because we knew we were going to make less money as professionals, but we knew that there was a benefit and that kept us going. We are laser-focused on affordability and putting money back into our members pockets.”

The efforts of the Hispanic Committee in support of the labor breakfast, women’s lunch and vendor area resulted in more than 250 signed letters of support for PEF’s legislative priorities. You can lend your voice to the efforts by signing letters at PEF’s online [Legislative Action Center](#) or via the PEF app. ([Click for download instructions.](#))

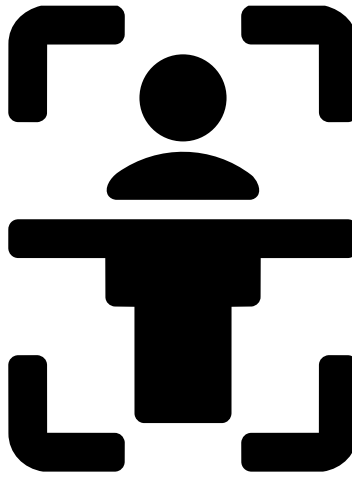
“Members enjoyed access to legislators and community leaders across the activities,” Falto said. “Developing personal connections can open doors when our leaders need to lobby for support on behalf of members.”

Stay tuned for more from the committee, Falto said.

“We will continue to offer networking and learning opportunities across the Regions, and we are exploring member interest in forming Hispanic Committee chapters in collaboration with Regional Coordinators,” she said. “One of our goals is to educate, so we will be offering information sessions on Workers’ Compensation, Article 15 benefits, and more, with bilingual support, because nothing feels better than being able to ask questions or express our thoughts in the language of our hearts – and for most of us in the Hispanic community, that is Spanish.”

For information, reach out to a member of the committee: Statewide Hispanic Committee Co-Chair Vivian Falto ([Vivian.Falto@pef.org](mailto:Vivian.Falto@pef.org)); Leticia Rivera, Co-Chair ([Leticia.Rivera@pef.org](mailto:Leticia.Rivera@pef.org)); or Vikky Urena, secretary ([Vikky.Urena@pef.org](mailto:Vikky.Urena@pef.org)). (Iris Carrasquillo serves as Co-Chair Emerita.)





# Key PEF-supported bill for body scanners at OCFS now heads to the Governor

By **NAJEE WALKER**

While the deadline for the New York State budget has passed, PEF still has a reason to celebrate. Legislation supported by the union to authorize the use of body scanners at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has passed both the New York State Senate and Assembly. It must be signed by Governor Kathy Hochul to become law.

As violence inside state-run facilities across all agencies rises, passage of this bill marks a step in the right direction for safer workplaces.

Support for bringing body scanners to state-operated juvenile facilities and locally operated and specialized secure facilities goes back many years. In 2025, PEF's advocacy helped push \$50 million to install body scanners and cameras at DOCCS facilities in New York. That same year, PEF member and Child Protective Services Specialist Zack Swift called for advancing legislation to install body scanners at OCFS facilities.

With the help of Senator James Skoufis (D-SD 42) and Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi (D-AD 28), the bill was voted on and passed both houses ahead of the 2026 budget. PEF is grateful to the legislature for their support.

The bill would allow the installation and use of body scanner technology to help prevent weapons, drugs and other contraband from getting into secure OCFS facilities for at-risk youth.

"Body scanning technology provides an additional layer of security for our staff and our members," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "I am eager to see New York State follow through by signing this into law, enhancing programming, and hiring more staff at OCFS, so our members can work safely and deliver critical services effectively and efficiently to New Yorkers in need."

President Spence also said that while this legislation is important, something similar needs to be done at other agencies, like the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

"There is legislation currently to bring these body scanners to OMH and OPWDD. We're hopeful that as budget talks continue, this legislation is one of many that is top of mind for legislators," said President Spence. "Our members deserve a safe place to work and cannot wait any longer for New York to come through for them."

**Your letters helped  
make this happen!  
Contact your  
legislators about all  
of PEF's priorities!**

[Learn More](#)

---

## Under Article 15 of the PEF/State Agreement

---

Up to **\$50,000** Available!

# Article 15 grant program awards up to \$50,000 for workforce, labor-management training

---

Under Article 15 of the PEF/State Agreement, grant money up to \$50,000 is available to fund unique Workforce Initiatives (WFI) and Labor-Management Nursing (LMN) training projects developed jointly by agency management and labor representatives.

The Professional Development Committee (PDC), made up of representatives from the Office of Employee Relations (OER) and PEF, oversees the program and is seeking grant proposals that:

- Allow PEF members to perform tasks that are currently, or might otherwise, be performed by outside vendors or consultants.
- Streamline current operations.
- Allow for the implementation of new practices.
- Institute innovative approaches to the agency's mission or work.
- Teach skills to prepare for both current and future workforce needs.
- Address changes in the agency, mission or goals, legal or regulatory requirements, work processes, Civil Service testing requirements or technology.

For LMN grant applications, projects that improve patient care; improve organizational performance or provide training or education that nurses, nurse educators, or the labor-management committee identify as important to their professional development, are encouraged.

Grant proposals ideally would be:

- Cost effective as shown by the number of participants who will benefit or be trained, the cost per participant, ongoing utilization of training, or overall impact of training on the agency.
- Wide-spread, providing agency-wide training across the state or more than one agency.
- Proposals that can be maintained by the agency or replicated by others.
- Proposals that involve agency contribution in some form, such as personnel, resources, release time, or expertise.
- Submitted by agencies that have not been awarded grants in previous cycles.

Agencies may submit up to four applications, to be received by June 15, 2026. Final determinations and notifications will be by July 31, 2026. [Full guidelines and applications can be accessed here](#). For more information, contact Janna Herchenroder or Tamara Carney in the PEF Education and Training Department at [janna.herchenroder@pef.org](mailto:janna.herchenroder@pef.org) or [tamara.carney@pef.org](mailto:tamara.carney@pef.org).

— Kate Stickle



## Four seats filled on Executive Board; two go to balloting

---

Four Executive Board seats were filled during the April 2026 special election.

Tanya Oliver was elected to Seat 50 (DOCCS); Cortney Edwards to Seat 200 (Health Main Office); Kevin Dobies to Seat 210 (SIF); and Jessica Schrufer to Seat 510 (DOT).

Seat 25 (DOCCS) and Seat 300 (OPWDD) will go to balloting. Vying for Seat 25 are Shana Koch and Shaun Wentland and for Seat 300 are Victoria Maunder and Megan Otis.

For those in contested elections, ballots will be mailed on May 18, 2026, from the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be returned to the address listed on the return envelope no later than 5 p.m. on June 9. Returned means in hand, not date mailed or postmarked. If an eligible voter has not received a ballot by May 26, 2026, please call AAA at (800) 529-5218 for a duplicate ballot packet (do not call prior to that date).

Ballots will be counted on June 10, 2026, by AAA in New York City starting at 10 a.m. If you would like to observe the count, email [SpecialElections@pef.org](mailto:SpecialElections@pef.org).

Ten vacant seats will be up for election in the next special election:

**Seat 1**, Agriculture & Markets

**Seat 15**, Civil Service

**Seat 80**, SUNY

**Seat 103**, SUNY

**Seat 115**, ENCON

**Seat 127**, Homeland Security

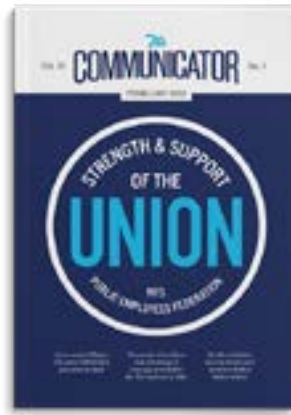
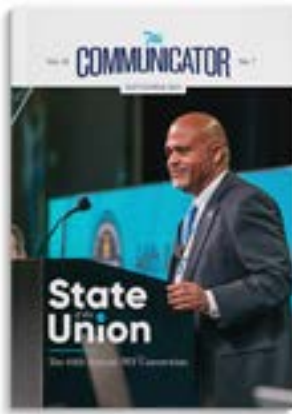
**Seat 161**, Executive

**Seat 169**, Executive

**Seat 385**, OMH

**Seat 560**, Roswell Park

The PEF Special Elections Committee is finalizing dates and those will be communicated as soon as they are available. For more information, visit [www.pef.org/elections](http://www.pef.org/elections).



# Sign up **TODAY** for the Communicator

Keeping PEF members current on PEF news, emailed to you monthly. Make sure we have your personal email address. PEF will never email at your work address.

Sign up at  
[www.pef.org/emailme](http://www.pef.org/emailme)



Patricia Moran and Scott Dobe take donation calls during the Variety Kids Telethon.

# Telethon raises \$1M for children's hospital, charities

By **KATE STICKLES**

The 64th Annual [Variety Kids Telethon](#) on March 21 and 22 raised \$1,014,326 to support Golisano Children's Hospital of Buffalo, and other children's charities.

PEF members Scott Dobe and Patricia Moran volunteered at the phone banks along with other representatives of labor in western New York.

"My three children were born at this hospital and two of them spent time as preemies in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit)," Dobe said. "This hospital has always been special to my family."

The telethon features a "celebrity child" each year, many of whom are eligible for services through New York state.

"As a physical therapist for the state Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), I have become close to many of the former celebrity children who are eligible to receive services through OPWDD," Dobe said. "Each year, many of these former celebrities return to the telethon which provides a place to catch up with each other."

Dobe and Moran see participating in the telethon not only as a way to support the children's hospital, but also to give back to the community that supported efforts to save Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center. PEF worked with families, area legislators, civic leaders and many others for five years to derail then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo's plan to close the facility and move the services to Buffalo Psychiatric Center.

"The local Western New York Area Labor Federation and Buffalo Central Labor Council are big supporters of the telethon and were big supporters of our efforts to save WNYCPC," Moran said. "It's an honor to spend a Sunday afternoon with our labor friends to help answer phones at the telethon."

"A small sacrifice of time goes a long way to helping the community in so many ways," they both said. "We build bridges with our union family, with the agency at large, and support the missions of our 'O-agencies' all at once."

The Variety Kids Telethon is the nation's longest-running, locally produced telethon. In 1962, Dr. Robert Warner asked Variety to help him fulfill his dream of a rehabilitation center for children with special needs. The first telethon raised more than \$80,000, and the Robert Warner Rehabilitation Center for Children with Special Needs became a reality at Women and Children's Hospital of Buffalo.





## Former PEF President Roger Benson, 1945-2026

Former PEF President Roger Benson passed away peacefully with his family by his side on April 1, 2026. He was 81 years old.

Benson served nine years as PEF President from 1997-2006. While working for New York State as a research scientist at the Department of Health's Wadsworth Laboratory in Albany, his groundbreaking work on bleeding disorders led to several patents and methods of practice still used today.

After becoming involved in PEF as a union steward, Benson held numerous leadership positions before running for president and winning election in 1997.

"Roger Benson's steady leadership, integrity, and unwavering commitment to our union laid a strong foundation for those who followed," said PEF President Spence, who credits Benson for giving him invaluable advice when he first took office in 2015.

"He said, 'If you don't have a mission and you don't have a vision, how do you know where you are going? How do the people around you know where you're going?'" recalled Spence. "So, I established a mission and a vision, which we still have today. His legacy endures in the progress we continue to make on behalf of our members."



PEF President Wayne Spence and former President Roger Benson at President Spence's third inauguration in Aug. 2021.

In his first term, following the expiration of the 1995-1999 PEF contract, after members had spent more than a year working without a successor agreement, Benson led 20,000 members at a protest in Albany, calling out then-Governor George Pataki. Members were joined in solidarity by thousands of members from CSEA. In response, the governor mobilized 300 State troopers.

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

By standing up to the Governor and making their case in the media, PEF eventually came to terms on a strong retroactive contract for the years 1999-2003, delivering annual raises and a lump-sum payment of \$500. During his tenure as PEF president, Benson would negotiate another strong contract that ran from 2003-2007 with across-the-board raises for the membership.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Benson went to bat for the families of members who were killed when insurance companies were slow to pay benefits. He mobilized staff and the PEF Membership Benefits Program to support those families and later oversaw the dedication of the 9/11 Memorial at PEF headquarters in Latham—a tribute in granite to those who were lost.

In his second term, from 2000-2003, Benson led PEF in its fight against Governor George Pataki’s attempts to slash the State budget, ultimately saving 11 facilities and 5,000 member jobs.

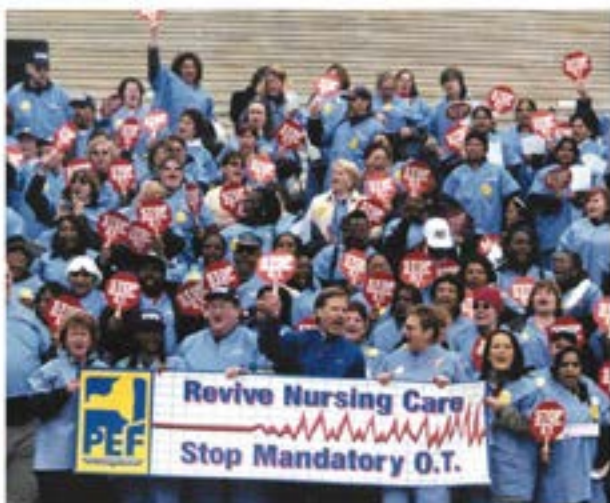
He also created the PEF Nurse Organizer position to mobilize and empower the union’s more than 11,000 nurses.

After winning an historic third term in 2003, Benson and his PEF team created a “Go Public” campaign, which advocated for a suite of legislation to expose the use of private contractors in State government. Most of the bills were passed into law, leading to far greater transparency regarding the State’s use of consultants and the resulting cost to taxpayers.

“The politicians win two ways,” Benson was quoted in the May 2006 issue of the PEF Communicator. “They can tell voters they’ve cut the state workforce, and they can collect big campaign donations from the grateful contractors.”

After declining to run for a fourth term, Benson retired to spend more time with his loved ones and pursue his passion for restoring classic cars. He is survived by his sister Marta Benson-Pike, his son Alexander Benson, and his loving companion Marsha Curran.

Calling hours will be held April 7 from 4:00-7:00 p.m. at New Comer Funeral Home, 343 New Karner Rd. in Colonie. A funeral service will take place April 8 from 10:00-11:00 a.m. at the funeral home, followed by a burial ceremony in Albany Rural Cemetery, 3 Cemetery Rd. in Albany.





PEF Statewide Retirees President Jim Carr, back row, center, was one of hundreds of retirees nationwide that met with AFT President Randi Weingarten (front row, blue blazer) recently in Washington, D.C.

# RETIREEES IN ACTION: Stay informed, engaged, and vote!

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

This month I'm going to focus my column on the importance of staying informed and engaged about political issues. This is more important now than ever. While some hoped the new administration in Washington would tackle the cost of living for working families and retirees, its first months prioritized billionaires like Elon Musk at the expense of workers, veterans, students and their families. It's been chaotic and cruel. We must meet this moment with a fight for dignity and opportunity for all, particularly working families.

Some believe the American dream is reserved for the rich and elite, but unions stand unapologetically with working people, fighting for higher wages, lower costs, safe working conditions, a secure retirement and a voice at work.

## **To build a better future, we must:**

Nurture community, while others sow chaos.

Fight in Congress, the courts and in the court of public opinion, and even in commerce to make working families the priority.

We must wage this fight at the bargaining table and the ballot box, in the halls of power and on the streets. We must fight for safe, fully funded, welcoming public service jobs, public schools and colleges that prepare and support our children for careers and life.

We must fight for a functioning government that works for all Americans. We must fight for funding and policies that help people, like safe healthcare staffing. We must fight against

cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, and education. We must fight for the vital safety net programs that are being threatened.

We must fight for freedom and opportunity for all, which only comes with real democracy - one that delivers for working people.

Progress is possible but not guaranteed; we must continue to fight for the promise of America - for opportunity, dignity, respect and a better life for all.

## **Elections matter**

Our fight is not with one party or another, it's with bad public policy that attacks unions, workers and retirees. Your party affiliation doesn't matter, what's important is that you educate yourself and vote. We must look at where candidates stand on issues that matter to us.

This year is an important election at all levels of government. Many candidates will have a primary election on Tuesday, June 23, 2026. Remember, to vote in a primary you must be registered in the party holding a primary.

There is one primary in the Democratic Party of great importance for PEF members and retirees! That's our PEF-endorsed Comptroller Tom DiNapoli. Unfortunately, it's a sign of the times and it appears some candidates are looking at our

pension fund. Please vote in all primaries for the party you're affiliated with, and if you're not registered to vote, now would be a great time to [get registered](#).

Here's just a few examples of Tom DiNapoli's accomplishments as our Comptroller:

- Identified billions in waste, fraud, and cost savings in government.
- Uncovered corruption in state and local governments, leading to dozens of arrests and tens of billions of dollars in restitution.
- Provided robust oversight of school district operations and education spending.
- Successfully advocated for state law changes to increase oversight of special education contractors after widespread abuse was found.
- Developed an early warning system to identify municipalities in school districts showing signs of fiscal stress.
- Earned a reputation as one of the leading shareholder voices on many corporate concerns, including environmental issues in corporate political spending.
- Opened up government spending on his transparency website Open Book New York.
- Led the fight for prudent fiscal and procurement reforms to help New York change how it does business and put it on better fiscal footing.
- Streamlined claims process for individuals to recover lost money. Returning millions in unclaimed funds to their rightful owners every year.
- Manages the New York state common retirement fund, which is one of the largest public pension funds in the United States.

## On Capitol Hill

I recently had the privilege of attending the annual in-person meeting of the AFT Retirees Public Policy Committee in Washington, where we created a 2025-2026 Action Plan with Objectives, Goals and Expectations. [You can find information here](#).

I always learn many important things at these meetings. We attended a press conference on artificial intelligence (AI) sponsored by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders on the dangers of unregulated AI. Union leaders and members from across America attended. You can check it out on the [AFT Retirees Facebook page](#) (anyone may join this group)! I would also recommend you check out the [PEF Retirees website](#).



# 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.

Charles Browning is a senior attorney at the New York State Insurance Fund in Endicott. To obtain a donation form, email [PersonnelOps@nysif.com](mailto:PersonnelOps@nysif.com).

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

Dale Dils is a correctional facility food administrator 2 at Collins Correctional Facility in Collins.

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 [MPersonnel@omh.ny.gov](mailto:MPersonnel@omh.ny.gov).

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

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](mailto:BSCBenefitsAdmin@ogs.ny.gov) to obtain a donation form.

Malkiyah Goldberg is a project manager 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany. Email [HR.LeaveManagement@its.ny.gov](mailto:HR.LeaveManagement@its.ny.gov) for 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](mailto:leaves@upstate.edu) to obtain a donation form.

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.

Gretchen Hoffman is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse. Email [leaves@upstate.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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.

Ina Maynor is a rehab assistant 2 at Capital District Psychiatric Center in Albany. Contact [Giles.Morrill@omh.ny.gov](mailto:Giles.Morrill@omh.ny.gov) or [Jamillah.Austin@omh.ny.gov](mailto:Jamillah.Austin@omh.ny.gov) to obtain a donation form.

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.

Jennifer Silvanic-Lopes is a Labor Service Representative at the Department of Labor in Endicott. Email [Labor.sm.personnel.leaves@labor.ny.gov](mailto:Labor.sm.personnel.leaves@labor.ny.gov) to obtain a donation form.

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

Donna Stevens is a Registered Nurse at the Capital District Psychiatric Center. Email [Giles.Morrill@omh.ny.gov](mailto:Giles.Morrill@omh.ny.gov) or [Jamillah.Austin@omh.ny.gov](mailto:Jamillah.Austin@omh.ny.gov) to obtain a donation form.

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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:communicator@pef.org), or call 518-785-1900.



May 1, 2026

May Day in NYC, Executive Board Member Scarlett Ahmed and PEF Health and Safety Specialist Michael Marquez joined labor allies including the Amazon Labor Union, Teamsters, and United Auto Workers to protest Amazon Web Services' ties to ICE and anti-union practices. They later rallied near the New York Stock Exchange with the Sunrise Movement and other groups, calling to "Tax the rich. No ICE, no war. Hands off our votes." Some protesters were arrested in a planned action, while Michael served as a street medic and Scarlett joined the solidarity rally.



April 27, 2026

Nurses at SUNY Stony Brook stopped by the PEF table for a pick-me-up and Contract updates! Here on Long Island, PEF is fighting for greater location pay and across-the-board raises -- among many other contract improvements. Thank you all our member nurses who do so much to care for their fellow New Yorkers!



April 25, 2026

PEF was well represented at the 25th anniversary luncheon of Eleanor's Legacy -- celebrating a quarter century of empowering women leaders in New York State!



April 23, 2026

PEF staff and NYC-based leaders attended a labor event in support of NYS Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli. The comptroller earned PEF's endorsement for his "steady stewardship of the pension fund" and has always been a friend of organized labor.



April 21, 2026

It's Work Zone Awareness Week and PEF members at the New York State Department of Transportation (Division 177) say it all with their t-shirts. Please drive slowly and safely in work zones.

April 20, 2026

Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky welcomed Division 357 (OITS) Council Leader Christopher Ford and Assistant Council Leader Heather Craven to Region 7. As a statewide division, 357 has members who work in the North Country, supporting technology at State agencies in Region 7. They met with members in the Adirondack town of Tupper Lake and in Ogdensburg, on the border with Canada.





April 20, 2026

A powerful day of learning in Buffalo. PEF members came together for AFT Street Medics training, led by incredible trainers Audra Lucas (AFT), Margaret Sergent (Rochester Teacher Association), and Mike Marquez (PEF). Thank you to our dedicated trainers and the engaged members who showed up ready to learn.



April 17, 2026

Division 183 (OMH Mohawk Valley) gathered at The Grape Vine for a membership meeting, bringing members together to connect, share updates, and discuss important priorities. We appreciate everyone who attended and contributed to the discussion.



April 30, 2026

Thanks to all the Region 11 members who turned out for the annual "Spring Fling"! Region 11 Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor reports a great time was had by all at Russo's on the Bay in Howard Beach and lots of money was raised for the Region 11 Scholarship Fund!



May 4, 2026

PEF leaders and members supported the winners of the annual Greater Syracuse Labor Council awards.



May 5, 2026

PEF Members at SUNY Downstate got an early start on Nurse Recognition Week with a reception. National Nurses Week runs May 6-12. Thank you to all PEF nurses for the compassion and care they deliver every day!



## Letters to the Editor

---

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

## We want to hear from you!

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

