

Vol. 44

The COMMUNICATOR

No. 6

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PEF IN ACTION

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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



Every ballot builds PEF's power

As summer draws to a close at the end of this month, I reflect with pride on the work we have done over the last few months.

We toured the State to present the 2026-2031 PS&T Tentative Agreement, providing information to voters and answering questions at dozens of worksites from Long Island to the North Country. Ballots are still being collected until 5 p.m. on August 17, so if you've put it off until now, there is time to get yours in the mail to meet the deadline so it can be counted on August 18. Your vote does more than just ratify a strong contract with across-the-board raises, increased location pay, and the creation of a PEF Employee Benefit Fund to deliver better dental and vision plans - it shows the State that PEF members are engaged and united. They will be paying attention to voter turnout as a signal of our strength, so please, if you have not already, mail back your ballot.

During one of my Contract Tour stops in PEF Region 7, members alerted me to an alarming situation at the Sunmount OPWDD facility in Tupper Lake. On that sweltering hot day, I toured parts of the secure facility and experienced first-hand the working and living conditions staff and residents were subjected to without air conditioning. A digital thermostat in one office showed a temperature of 84 degrees! I immediately raised the issue with State officials and pressed them to act. When the problem remained unresolved, we brought public attention to it, resulting in coverage by the [Albany Times Union](#), the [Daily Gazette](#), and the [New York Post](#). A month later, I'm proud to share that OPWDD will install air conditioning units this month where they are desperately needed, after bringing in six portable AC units to address the issues in July. It should not require union intervention for the State to do the right thing, but I'm glad our advocacy helped bring about positive change.

Last month, as an AFT Vice President, I was joined by fellow PEF Statewide Officers and 18 additional PEF leaders and members as delegates at the biennial [American Federation of Teachers Convention in Washington, D.C.](#) At a Convention with the theme "Fighting for a Better Life for ALL," PEF authored and passed three resolutions dealing with affordability, the housing crisis, and workplace violence. In my conversations with fellow union leaders, it was clear that what PEF fights for - fair contracts, health and safety, respect, and resources to serve the public - are universal demands in the labor movement. It was inspiring to know we're not alone and gave me some great ideas for our 48th Annual Convention this October in Niagara Falls.

We have a packed calendar ahead - from summer divisional picnics to Labor Day parades on Sept. 8 to a DOCCS Statewide Labor-Management Conference later next month. Reach out to your stewards and council leaders for more information about events in your area and thank you for your continued activism. Please get in touch with your [regional office](#) or PEF Field Representative if there's anything PEF can do for you.

In Unity,

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Wayne Spence
PEF President

Contract vote deadline extended; members continuing to make their voices heard

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The PEF Contract Team negotiated a five-year tentative agreement with New York State in June, and the PEF Executive Board voted to approve the text and send it to members for ratification consideration.

Dues-paying members of the Professional, Scientific, and Technical (PS&T) bargaining unit as of June 17, 2026, now have the final say.

The agreement lays out the terms of a new five-year contract from April 2, 2026-April 1, 2031. It includes across-the-board wage increases of 4.5%, 4%, 3.5%, 3%, and 3% each year of the deal. It also gives PEF the ability to create an Employee Benefit Fund to administer dental and vision insurance for members, something PEF President Wayne Spence started asking for when he was first elected in 2015.

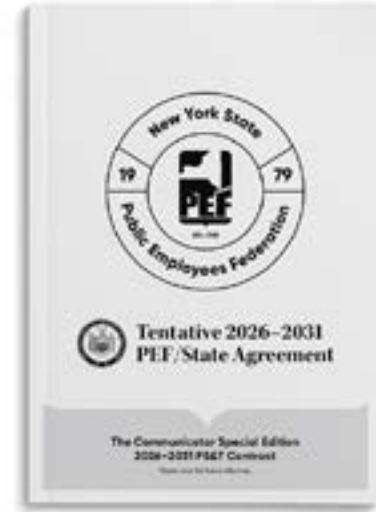
“There’s \$200 million of new money in this contract that no other unions have gotten because they already had the dental,” said President Spence. “I had a conversation with the Governor in the last contract when I asked her if PEF members were genetically superior to other unions because we must not get cavities and gingivitis and all the other things that come with dental health because they were getting way more money than we were — an average of \$400 more per year for every member.”

In addition to the major dental upgrades, highlights of the agreement include increases to location pay and the addition of Ulster County to location pay for the Mid-Hudson region, Special Assignment to Duty (SAD) pay increases, lump sum payments for long-term seasonal employees, hazardous duty bonus pay, the release of the total compensation study from the Department of Civil Service, and much more.

RELATED: [Check out the highlights and gains and trade-offs of the tentative agreement](#)

Starting in mid-June, PEF President Spence and VP and Contract Chair Darlene Williams were joined by other statewide officers and Contract Team members during a tour that stopped in every PEF Region with one goal — meet with members to present the contract and let them ask questions ahead of the ratification vote.

“Members came to these meetings engaged and asking questions,” said Vice President Williams. “I can’t stress enough how important it is for members to exercise their right to vote. They need to do it in big numbers so the State sees how united this union is!”



The most frequent question from members was about the length of the contract.

“When our brothers and sisters at other unions agreed to their contracts, they set the pattern,” said Vice President Williams. “So our team went back and tried to get additional provisions to make this contract better. Which is why we are now looking at better dental coverage, more location pay, and the compensation study.”

For many members, hearing directly from the negotiating team helped them decide how to vote.

“I’m not a huge fan of the five-year, but there is nothing that is being offered that is terribly negative,” said Beth Murray, an RN and PEF Council Leader with OPWDD in Region 2. “I am; however, a huge fan of the raises and cumulative amount of money that gets put back into my pocket.”

By now, all eligible voters should have received a printed and bound copy of the Tentative Agreement, as well as their ballot in a bright yellow envelope. Ballots must be mailed back to PEF’s vote vendor, the American Arbitration Association (AAA), and received by 5 p.m. on August 17. Votes will be counted and results will be reported on August 18.

Any eligible voter who has not received a ballot is urged to call AAA immediately at (800) 529-5218, or email Sacha Uleiro at uleiros@adr.org to request a replacement ballot.



Scenes from meetings with President Spence and members of the PEF Contract Team. From mid-June through late July 2026, the team visited all 12 PEF regions and met with thousands of members.



PEF raises questions about the success of NYHELPS

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The history of choosing government workers via civil service examinations goes back as far as 605 C.E. in China, when officials were selected based on merit, not nepotism. In the mid-1800s, the British government adopted a system of merit-based civil service examinations. The U.S. Congress followed suit in 1883 and New York enshrined civil service exams in the State's Constitution in 1894.

In 2023, New York State modified its standards with the introduction of the Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide (HELPS) program, which was rebranded as NY HELPS a year later.

HELP was proposed as a temporary measure to assist hiring direct care, health, and safety titles in the wake of the pandemic without the need for competitive examinations. Participation was limited to 12 agencies; DOCCS, DOH, OMIG, Justice Center, OCFS, NYSIF, OASAS, OMH, SUNY, DCS, OTDA and OPWDD.

The program was expanded in 2024 to include all agencies and is described on the DCS website as a "program that streamlines the appointment process to allow State agencies to hire diverse, qualified permanent employees quickly and without examination."

PEF did not fully oppose HELPS or NY HELPS initially because the union was told it was a temporary response to a severe short staffing crisis which PEF members were feeling acutely coming out of Covid. PEF was also cognizant of the many members that were performing the jobs of two to three workers, due to multiple vacancies. PEF recognizes the program has attracted

a new generation of civil service workers; it accelerated the hiring process and created additional opportunities for career advancement long unattainable to PEF members because of a lack of examinations. But now, as the program continues to extend year after year, PEF is questioning what the future of civil service in New York will look like.

"PEF President Spence has asked us to take this moment in time, three years after the program was created, to assess what success means," said PEF Director of Civil Service Enforcement and Research (CSE/R) Veronica Foley. "Have we met those benchmarks and what does the modernization of civil service mean to the State?" PEF continues to monitor and assess the HELP's program to make sure that the "spoils system" does not return to New York.

The PEF CSE/R team has released a editorial titled "[NY HELPS and the End of the History of Competitive Examinations](#)" that raises concerns about the legitimacy of the program under the State's Constitutional mandate, the scope and limits of the power of the Civil Service Commission, the lack of accountability and transparency in the administration of the program, the lack of data to objectively evaluate whether NY HELPS is successful, and the absence of willingness for an open, responsible and productive dialogue with PEF about the future of NY HELPS and what systems and practices will replace it.

"Millions of dollars have been applied to the implementation of the State's latest civil service modernization plan," said Foley. "Yet it remains unclear to the union, its leaders and the public what this modernization is and whether or not the State is hiring and retaining diverse and qualified employees while also upholding our democratic institutions."

This report is the first of many that PEF CSE/R intends to publish, which will raise questions about the use of emergency hiring practices and how they align with modernization when discussed through the lens of democracy.

Mykolas Gudelis is a research associate with CSE/R. He emphasized that while there are benefits to NY HELPS, the program was not implemented through legislation, but via emergency powers claimed by DCS. When agencies want to stealthily change something to their advantage, they will use the New York State Register process, which in the minds of some, circumvents the legislative process. It is a publication where state executive agencies cleverly publish proposed and adopted rules. This little-known process, mandated by the State Administrative Procedure Act (SAPA), allows agencies to establish binding regulations.

“The keyword here is emergency. The history of legal scholarship shows that in an emergency, the norms, rules and regulations that function in a normal state are suspended,” Gudelis said. “In the case of NY HELPS, we had a bleeding of the workforce (during Covid). Therefore, we had to do things that do not follow the regular norms. But the question is who has the power to suspend rules and declare an emergency?”

In order to gather evidence to answer the questions raised in the article, PEF CSE/R recently sent a letter to the Governor’s Office asking for data related to the retention rates of the tens of thousands of workers hired via the program.

“The NYS Department of Civil Service makes it clear every couple of months how many appointments they’ve made through NY HELPS, but that is the only data point they’re sharing,” said Foley. “In 2023, when the program’s first iteration was presented, PEF was told that this program would give the Department of Civil Service the space needed to administer examinations, open all 12 regional computer-based testing centers, and that we were going to have a total compensation study.”

As of July 31, 2026, DCS has opened five of the 12 computer-based testing centers that taxpayers have funded and plans to open seven more by the end of 2027.

The much-hyped total compensation study, first bought up by the Governor herself in 2022 as a way to look at how State workers’ compensation compares to their counterparts in the private sector, will be shared with PEF by Jan. 31, 2027, if the current 2026-2031 tentative agreement for the union’s PS&T unit is ratified by members on Aug. 18.



PEF delegates were honored to meet Dolores Huerta, center, who co-founded the United Farm Workers and was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from AFT for her decades of work devoted to civil rights, workers' rights, and public education.

AFT Convention delivers on theme 'Fighting for a Better Life for ALL'

The 2026 AFT Convention was held July 16-19, in Washington, D.C. It was the union's largest in 15 years, with 3,500 delegates. PEF President Wayne Spence, who is also an AFT Vice President, led PEF's delegation, which included all three vice presidents as automatic delegates (Randi DiAntonio, Bruce Giddings, and Darlene Williams), as well as 18 elected delegates from PEF and seven guests who represented the union.

President Spence had a packed schedule during the multi-day gathering, hosting the AFT Civil & Human Rights Committee luncheon as chair and delivering opening and closing remarks, as well as attending meetings of the AFT Executive Committee, Executive Council, and Convention Committee. In the evening, receptions were held at the National Museum of African American History and Culture and in [support of COPE](#), the political action committee that raises money to support lobbying for organized labor's priorities at the federal level.

"The AFT Convention takes place every two years and is always an exciting time, but it is very busy," said President Spence. "Over the years, PEF leaders and members have stepped up to help with various aspects of AFT's work, and it's gratifying to see PEF recognized as a leading public sector union in the AFT."

PEF authored four resolutions for Convention delegates to consider. Three were debated and passed, and one did not reach the floor.

PEF VP Randi DiAntonio introduced a resolution titled [Fight for Affordability and Improved Quality of Life](#), which concludes "AFT will use every tool at our disposal—political action, legislative advocacy, media campaigns and grassroots organizing—to ensure AFT members can build financial security and share fully in the prosperity of the nation they serve."

She also spoke on behalf of a resolution called [Advancing Union-Backed Housing Models for AFT Public Sector Members](#), which PEF supported through its work in the AFT Public Employees Division. The resolution calls on AFT to recognize housing affordability and access to homeownership as a "core labor, economic justice and workforce sustainability issue for public sector members."

PEF VP Darlene Williams addressed delegates on behalf of the third resolution, [AFT Members Refuse to Accept Violence as Part of the Job](#). Based on PEF's years-long advocacy against workplace violence, the resolution commits AFT to a variety of mitigation efforts – including the creation of a workplace violence reporting tool and working with federal legislators to deliver a Government Accountability Office study on the impact of workplace violence across all the divisions AFT represents – public services, healthcare and education.

Delegates also had the opportunity this year to participate in a [Day of Service](#), which involved a trip to the historic Shiloh Baptist

Church. They distributed 5,000 books and 500 backpacks to students, as well as essential food and hygiene items for people facing affordability challenges or experiencing homelessness. The effort supported eight public schools and numerous after-school programs, ensuring local families have the resources they need.

"In the same space where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. shared his words of empowerment with the community, we experienced the true meaning of Union leadership and power: which for me is to be of service to others," said delegate Vivian Falto, who also chairs the PEF Hispanic Committee. "The Day of Service really showed what organized labor can do when it works together."

Delegates were equally busy during the General Sessions of the Convention, which saw AFT celebrate the years-long fight to save SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn, and the multi-union coalition that fought for and won significant reforms to Tiers 5 and 6 of the New York State pension plan. President Spence addressed the delegates about both major wins, which never would have happened without PEF's leadership and contributions to coalitions of clergy, community leaders and organized labor.

PEF Vice President Darlene Williams was also honored during the Women's Rights Breakfast on the final day of the Convention with a Living Legacy Award for her 40 years of commitment to organized labor.

The next AFT Convention will be held in Portland, Oregon, in July 2028. PEF members in AFT-represented titles may petition to be a delegate. Instructions regarding the process will be communicated to eligible members and posted on the [PEF elections page](#) at a later date.

Editor's Note: The AFT features comprehensive coverage of the Convention on its [website](#).





9 seats filled on Executive Board during special elections; 1 goes to balloting

Nine Executive Board seats were filled following the April 2026 special election.

Gregory Deiulio was elected to fill **Seat 1** (representing certain members at the Department of Agriculture and Markets; **Grace Felix** was elected to **Seat 80** (representing certain members at SUNY); **Kaleb Winters** will fill **Seat 115** (representing certain members at the Department of Environmental Conservation); **Samuel Maxsween** will fill **Seat 127** (representing certain members at Homeland Security; and **Eric Stephens** was elected to **Seat 169** (representing certain members in the Executive offices).

Also, **Charles Browning** will fill **Seat 207** (representing certain members at the State Insurance Fund); **Shaquanna Perry** was elected to **Seat 385** (representing certain members at the Office of Mental Health); **Heidi Bazicki** will fill **Seat 420** (representing certain members at the Department of Motor Vehicles); and **Donald Oshea** was elected to **Seat 440** (representing certain members at the Office of Children and Family Services).

Seat 560 (representing certain members at Roswell Park) will head to balloting, and voters will decide between **Rebecca Deitzer** and **Mary Miller-Kotrys**.

Ballots will be mailed August 17, 2026, and must be returned to the address listed on the return envelope no later than 5 p.m. on September 8. Returned in this case means in hand, not the date mailed or postmarked. Ballots will be counted on September 9 by AAA in New York City starting at 10 a.m. If you would like to observe the count, email SpecialElections@pef.org.

Remaining vacant seats will be up for election in the October 2026 special election:

- **Seat 15**, Civil Service
- **Seat 103**, SUNY
- **Seat 161**, Executive

For more information, visit www.pef.org/elections.

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PEF members help bring Revolutionary New York exhibit to life

By **KATE STICKLES**

The New York State Museum recently opened Revolutionary New York, a new exhibition commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and highlighting New York's role in shaping democracy in America.

Without the skills and efforts of PEF members, this massive undertaking would not have happened.

"This amazing exhibit is the product of the expertise, dedication and hard work of PEF members at the New York State Museum, along with their CSEA co-workers, and with colleagues in PEF positions in the state library and archives," said Mickey Dobbin, a research collections technician at the NYSM, Treasurer of Division 194 and Executive Board member.

The nearly 7,000-square-foot exhibition brings together more than 200 artifacts, rare documents, immersive displays, interactive elements, and powerful stories that connect the Revolution's founding ideals to the continuing pursuit of freedom, equality, justice, and civic responsibility across generations, according to a press release from the State Education Department.

The exhibit includes this Revolutionary War-era gunboat, previously featured in the Communicator, that invites visitors to explore events from the 1763 Treaty of Paris through the War of 1812, highlighting the state's role in the fight for liberty.



Revolutionary New York is a long-term exhibit on display until July 8, 2029, in the main Exhibition Hall.





The Region 5 Women's Committee collected donations for the American Civic Association. The Committee plans to host similar drives in the future.

Women's Committee ramps up in Region 5

By KATE STICKLES

Region 5 is working to energize its Women's Committee, kicking things off with a meet-and-greet meeting this spring.

"We had a decent turnout," said Committee Chair Leslie Apacible, who works as a Disability Analyst at the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) in Endicott and leads the PEF Division 399 council there. "We want to provide a space where people can have a common ground for sharing work gripes and stressors or just have conversations."

Committee members voted to meet quarterly and donate to local charitable organizations in the Binghamton area.

"Our most recent collection was for the Binghamton-based [American Civic Association](#)," Apacible said. "We collected boxes full of needed women's goods and other supplies for local communities."

In a thank you letter to the committee, the American Civic Association said: "The ACA relies on kind donors such as yourself to continue with our mission of integrating immigrants into the community, Refugee Social Services Program (RSSP), and Naturalization. Our current focus includes expanding our multicultural programs and services in order to better serve the needs of our diverse community. Your support is important to us and makes it possible to achieve our goals."

For more information or to join the committee, send an email to Leslie.Apacible@pef.org.



President Wayne Spence answers a member's question about the tentative agreement at a Region 8 meeting in Albany.

Elected leaders, contract team travel statewide to discuss tentative agreement

By NAJEE WALKER and KATE STICKLES

At a special meeting June 11, the Executive Board voted to approve the full text of the 2026-2031 PEF/State Tentative Agreement and send it to the membership for ratification.

PEF President Wayne Spence then led his fellow Statewide Officers and the Contract Team on a statewide tour to meet with members, discuss details of the agreement, and field questions about the agreement's across-the-board wage increases, a new dental benefit, changes in copay structure, and much more.

From mid-June to the Fourth of July, PEF held 44 meetings in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8, with more than 1,000 members attending. More stops are scheduled for the rest of this month in the Regions that have not yet been visited. (RSVP here to attend a meeting.)

PEF Contract Chair and Vice President Darlene Williams said the team was the first union at the table and worked tirelessly to get a contract with across-the-board wage increases that mattered to members.

"When we introduced our proposals at the table, we started with Article 7," she said. "We opened a four-year contract with across-the-board wage increases of 6%, 6%, 5%, and 5%. The state, after many months of not coming to the table with a counteroffer, came back to the table with a three-year contract with increases of 3% each year. We said no."

When other unions accepted a tentative agreement that delivered 4.5%, 4%, 3.5%, 3% and 3% raises over the course of five years, President Spence instructed the team to hold out for a better deal.

That perseverance, coupled with PEF's commitment to bringing a fair contract to members that recognized their skills as professional, scientific, and technical employees, led to multiple actions that pushed the state to add \$40 million in seed money for a new dental and vision plan that would be administered by PEF, a guarantee that the state would release the results of the total compensation study commissioned by the state and discuss it with the union, additional upgrades to health insurance, and more.

"The Albany rally drew more than 500 people and helped us send a message to the Governor that we would not just accept what other unions were getting," said Vice President Williams, about the June 4 rally outside the State Capitol during a meeting of the Executive Board. "The dental plan and the compensation study have been PEF priorities for some time. Now we have that built into this contract for our members."

At a meeting at the Hornell State Office building in Region 2 and several meetings in Region 7, members had questions about the new Employee Benefit Fund. Team members said the vision is to establish an in-house, PEF-administered plan similar to or better than the plan offered by CSEA. While it would take some time to setup, members would not see a gap in coverage while PEF works to get the plan up and running.

Director of Contract Administration Ben Traslaviña said it may take about a year for the benefit fund to be ready for members, but in the meantime, the tentative agreement puts in place increases to current benefits that will bridge the gap.

“PEF has negotiated increases to the current dental plan, including \$4,000 for your annual maximum, \$4,000 for the lifetime orthodontic maximum, and up to \$1,200 for implant coverage per implant,” he told members at a contract meeting. “Crowns and inlays can now be replaced every five years instead of every three, and the out-of-network reimbursement schedule is increased by 10%. For those paying out-of-network costs, those will now be decreased.”

At several meetings, including the Region 7 meetings at OPWDD’s Sunmount facility and Adirondack Park Agency, members reacted positively to elimination of stacked copays in health insurance, something that commonly happens with lab work, as well as the compounding nature of across-the-board wages.

Using a Grade 18 as an example, team members drove home the value of the tentative agreement.

“Not including step increases, a Grade 18 member whose salary is currently \$88,000 will see their salary increase to \$91,960 in the first year of the contract,” said contract team member Chris Ford at a meeting in Ogdensburg. “They will break six figures at \$105,014 by the end of the five-year agreement.”

Many were concerned about the duration of the agreement. The most common question at each meeting was why PEF agreed to a five-year deal and how PEF arrived at a 4.5% starting increase, as well as why the wage increases—through compounding—decrease over time.

“When other unions are given a contract and they agree to it, even tentatively, it sets the pattern for all the other unions,” President Spence told members at several meetings. “The Governor is negotiating with PEF, CSEA, NYSCOPBA, the State Trooper’s Union and UUP all at the same time.”

VP Williams said that was why PEF fought to add more, like the dental plan and the release of the Civil Service study, to set PEF apart from other unions.

Many members said information provided at the meetings eased their concerns about the length of the agreement.

Beth Murray, a Registered Nurse with OPWDD in the Finger Lakes, said that while she was a hard sell on a five-year contract, ultimately, the benefits outweighed the risks.

“I am not a huge fan of the five years, but the contract doesn’t offer us anything that is terribly negative,” said Murray. “Plus, I am a huge fan of the raises and the cumulative amount of money it puts back in our pockets.”



PEF Vice President and Contract Chair Darlene Williams addresses members at the Monroe Developmental Center in Rochester on July 1.

William Mack, a Registered Nurse at OMH agrees. As he looks ahead to the potential future, he said the security the wage increases provide is worth it.

“The likelihood of us having a financial crisis or crash in the next five years seems more likely than having a lengthy protracted inflation, and having gone through all those years with 0-2% raises, I am happy to lock in for five years,” he said.

All members are encouraged to return their ballot – regardless of their vote – because it sends a message to the Governor and to legislators that PEF members are engaged and powerful.

“This team worked hard to preserve the rights and the value of PEF members because we are professional, scientific, and technical employees and that sets us apart,” said Vice President Bruce Giddings. “My initial thought was that five years was a little concerning. However, after researching, after discussing with the contract team, after considering everything, I’ve reconsidered my thoughts. I firmly believe that this five-year contract is a positive contract.”

Members still have a chance to hear from the Contract Team at upcoming meetings in Regions 6 and 9-12 through July 13. Members who are interested in attending a meeting should [RSVP](#).





Understanding sick leave credit at retirement

Sick leave credit changes proposed in the tentative 2026-2031 PS&T agreement would be based on a 2015 life expectancy table, rather than the current 1999 tables, for employees retiring on or after Jan. 1, 2027.

What does that mean for you?

Sick leave credit is the actuarial value of your monthly sick leave credit, calculated at the time of retirement, and used to offset the monthly cost of your New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP) premium.

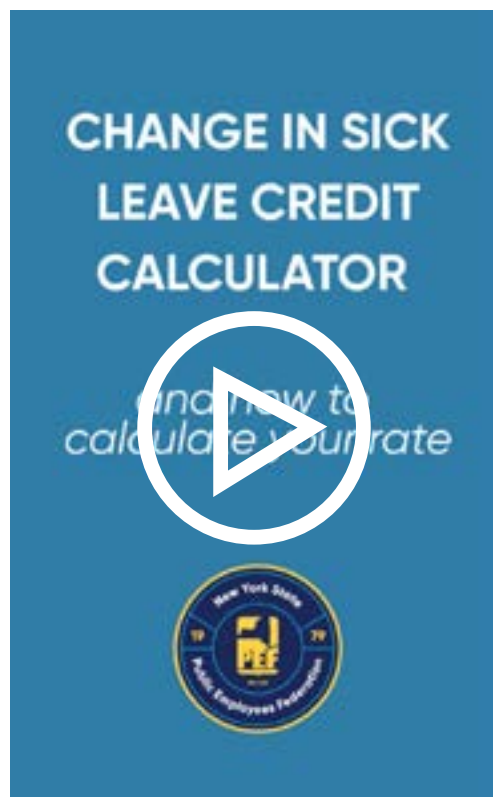
People are living longer, and with the updated life expectancy tables, the value of your sick leave at retirement will be less. Your calculation is different depending on your salary and the hours you work each week. Your hourly rate of pay includes annual salary plus additional factors such as location pay, shift or geographic differential, and inconvenience pay.

As an example: A member with a total annual salary of \$90,000; the maximum 200 days, or 1,600 sick leave hours accrued; and a 40-hour workweek (8 hours a day), would earn a sick leave credit of \$68,960. This equates to \$204.63 under the current 1999 life expectancy table and \$182.43 under the proposed 2015 table – a difference of \$22/month if retiring at age 55. Retirement at 65 would equate to \$286.14 a month under the old tables and \$248.95 under the proposed – a difference of \$38 a month.

While PEF wants members to be aware of this pending change in how sick leave credit will be calculated if the contract is ratified, members should keep in mind that the across-the-board raises they earn each year of the contract will also increase the value of each hour of sick leave, since their wages will be increasing year over year.

You can calculate your own sick leave by visiting www.cs.ny.gov/employee-benefits/login (this currently reflects the 1999 tables, but will be updated if the contract is ratified).

For more information, [watch this video](#) about calculating sick leave credit.



PEF members at Pilgrim Psychiatric Center talk health and safety with State Senator Martinez

By NAJEE WALKER

When New York State Senator Monica Martinez visited Pilgrim Psychiatric Center on July 21, PEF members took the opportunity to meet with her during lunch to discuss their experiences working at the facility. Over the years, members who work at the facility have faced increasing workplace violence at the hands of the patients they serve. Although PEF has been working with the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to address issues, the meeting between members and the Senator was scheduled to provide further support.

PEF members shared stories of hazardous working conditions, violence against staff, and other issues that contribute to Pilgrim having one of the highest instances of workplace violence among Office of Mental Health (OMH) facilities. Nurses, social workers, and other PEF health professionals attended. A major concern expressed was the frequency at which members are forced to work alone with patients who are threatening them or who return to the facility after multiple violent and criminal offenses.

Ivan Giannou is a Registered Nurse at Pilgrim and the Council Leader for PEF Division 233 at the facility. He said that management needing to take workplace violence more seriously an issue.

"While the OMH statewide leadership has encouraged local health and safety committees to have regular workplace violence meetings, this facility has repeatedly stated they will only have one meeting per year," said Giannou. "Workplace violence reports are most useful when the information can be looked at for trends to address in real-time, not to serve as historical documents and looked at by the hundreds once a year by committee members."

For PEF and the Senator, the goal is the same: Ensure that members have the support they need to continue to do the work that needs to be done for New Yorkers without fearing for their safety.

"Those who treat patients suffering from a mental health crisis mustn't be forced to choose between helping those in distress and their personal safety," said Senator Martinez. "Going to work



State Senator Monica Martinez (black shirt with back to camera) visited Pilgrim on July 21 to listen to PEF members and staff about health and safety concerns at the facility.

must come with an expectation that you won't be assaulted during your shift. I stand with the PEF nurses who do difficult work, in frequently challenging and sometimes dangerous conditions, to demand that their safety be protected."

PEF member Bahiyya Baskerville, who works at one of Pilgrim's outpatient clinics as a social worker, left the meeting with a sense of hope.

"I appreciated the opportunity to meet with Senator Martinez," said Baskerville. "She listened with compassion and sincerity, making everyone feel heard and respected. It was a refreshing and hopeful conversation that left me feeling encouraged and optimistic about the possibilities that come through open dialogue and collaboration."

Council Leader Giannou agreed.

"Staff understand there are inherent risks working in mental health, but we're here to help people, not be attacked by individuals who feel there are no consequences for their actions," he said. "I believe there is some forward momentum from the meeting, as the Senator was very receptive to all our concerns. The challenge now is developing our various concerns and issues into actionable pieces that she can help assist with in her capacity as a state representative."



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Walkthroughs support calls for action at Cocksackie and Greene Correctional Facilities

By NAJEE WALKER

Leadership at PEF and staff members from PEF Health & Safety conducted walkthroughs of Greene Correctional Facility and Cocksackie Correctional Facility on July 9 and July 13. The walkthroughs were conducted in response to concerns raised during membership meetings regarding safety in both facilities.

DOCCS facilities across the state are experiencing an increase in exposure incidents, harassment, assaults and other hazards. As part of PEF's ongoing efforts to address these issues, walkthroughs are a useful tool in helping address problem areas, support members, and highlight critical issues to agency leadership and management.

At Greene Correctional Facility, PEF's summary report noted several troubling findings, including an overall lack of cleanliness. Walls, floors, doors, and other surfaces were marked with unknown substances – which may indicate the presence of bodily fluids or chemicals. Several bags of property belonging to incarcerated individuals, as well as trash, food and staff belongings were piled in halls. In certain areas, like the Residential Rehabilitation Unit (RRU)—a separate housing unit used for therapy and rehabilitation programs for individuals unable to be among the general population—walkthrough participants noted a burning odor and mild haze, burned paper remnants, poor ventilation, extreme temperatures and unsanitary conditions.

By comparison, Cocksackie Correctional Facility seemed cleaner. PEF Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger and PEF Statewide Health and Safety Committee Co-Chair and Region 9 Coordinator Gabriela Franklyn participated in the tour with PEF Health and Safety staff. The summary report noted that overall airborne toxin and smoke incidents were down, but incidents of chemicals being thrown on to staff have risen seven-fold over the past six months. Additionally, staff noted that most programs and classes seemed to be running without issues. Corrections Officers, National Guard and staff members are equipped with body-worn cameras and Personal Alarm Devices. The superintendents and managers on duty change frequently and communication channels between the union and facility management seem to be open and working as intended. That is not happening statewide at all DOCCS facilities. Some areas at Cocksackie did have broken glass in doors and windows.



At both facilities, staff reported high temperatures in different areas, staffing shortages in each sector, including nursing, housekeeping, and among Corrections Officers. Additionally, a lack of security was noted either due to constantly rotating National Guard members or due to National Guard members not understanding their role within the facility.

Following both walkthroughs, PEF held a membership meeting with members from both facilities to talk about the findings, solutions and next steps.

At the meeting, PEF President Wayne Spence asked members to bring forward ideas for helping to solve some of the most pressing issues, including how PEF can advocate for teachers at DOCCS to have safer programming.

"I believe that is the question to be asked," said President Spence. "Can we do this safely? I think we can run the program, but we just can't run it the same way we did before there was a strike."

Several members offered solutions, including focusing on programs that support teaching the general population rather than those in the RRU. By switching the focus, some members say that in addition to prioritizing the individuals who need to finish their programming and who are trying to rehabilitate themselves, the switch would make facilities safer by not trying to prioritize programming in situations where staffing is low.

PEF Statewide Health and Safety Co-Chair and Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham was present for the Greene walkthrough. She called it disturbing and said that these kinds of issues are preventing members at DOCCS from doing their jobs well.

"I think the thing people forget—and you could hear it today—people, as hard as it is, they really want to do a good job. And a good job to them is providing good training and education and services to the I/Is (incarcerated individuals) under their charge," said Abraham. "And what I found really interesting was in this forum people were like, 'I can't do my job and I really want to do it' so that people can leave. I found that encouraging and really sad because DOCCS doesn't seem to put forth all the resources necessary to keep people safe."

Health and safety advocacy continues to be a priority for PEF, especially in DOCCS facilities. Following the meeting, PEF Statewide Health and Safety Committee Co-Chair and Region 9 Coordinator Gabriela Franklyn said that the key is identifying what that advocacy looks like.

"Whether that means showing up at a meeting, or participating in political actions or rallies," said Franklyn, "it is key to develop and train our stewardship and Executive Board so that they know our policies in terms of DOCCS, but also know the collective bargaining agreement so that they can be expedient in advocating for members' needs."

PEF plans to look into some sort of improved reporting system for assaults and health and safety issues at facilities. In addition, a communication platform is needed so OMH staff assigned to Corrections Based Operations (CBO) can efficiently share reports with labor and management. Any lag in reporting prevents timely responses and leads to inaccurate records. It is also imperative that members feel encouraged and supported by the union when they do report anything. Concerns about retaliation by management or incarcerated individuals are very real.

Those are some of the ideas that will be on the table when PEF brings together union leaders and DOCCS management at the DOCCS Statewide Labor-Management conference, scheduled for Sept. 23-25 in Albany.



PEF members and staff participated in a union meeting on July 30 addressing the findings of the walkthroughs.

PEF secures millions in unlawfully calculated OT during Covid

By KATE STICKLES

Nearly 2,000 members and former members who answered New York State Department of Health COVID-19 Hotline calls and helped the Department of Labor manage increased unemployment insurance claims will receive compensation after PEF resolved its lawsuit challenging the state's handling of COVID-19 overtime pay.

In December 2023, the state made about \$3 million in principal payments. It will now make roughly \$845,000 in interest payments. The average payment is about \$490, with the highest totaling \$10,197.27 and at least 60 members receiving thousands of dollars.

The lawsuit argued that the state unlawfully calculated overtime at one-and-one-half times either the average of employees' regular hourly rate and a lower-graded rate, or only the lower-graded rate, instead of one-and-one-half times their regular rate of pay.

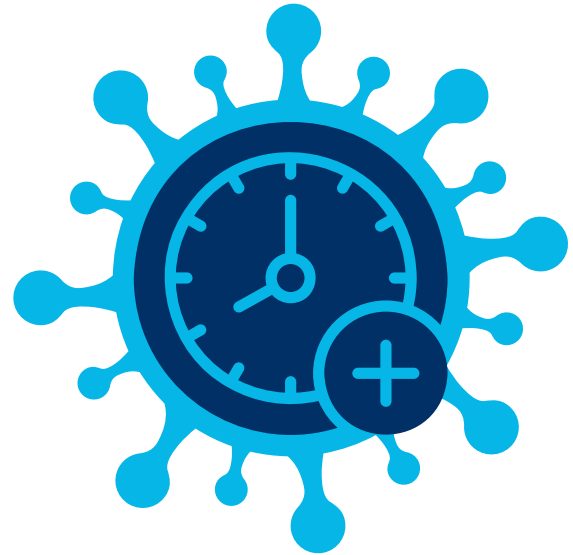
"When people go to work, they expect, at a minimum, to be paid what they are owed," said PEF Assistant General Counsel David Friedman. "Union involvement allowed us to seek redress for all underpaid individuals as a group of represented employees. Because of PEF and President Spence's involvement, we were able to move quickly in court without naming every impacted individual."

The win was a collaborative effort.

PEF Field Services staff provided the Legal Department with documents, emails, and contact information for members willing to speak out, while Contract Administration monitored the issue and filed grievances to preserve members' contractual rights.

In July 2020, President Spence and three PEF members filed the lawsuit against then Governor Andrew Cuomo, several Executive Branch offices and agencies, and their respective heads.

The settlement resolves the contract grievances and creates a process for PEF to address any remaining disputes over



payment amounts. PEF has until Dec. 30, 2026, to present disputes. If you believe you were paid incorrectly, contact PEF and provide supporting documentation to COVIDOT@pef.org as soon as possible.

PEF has notified impacted individuals and provided details, including the amount each person should receive. Some may also hear directly from their employer, and those receiving \$2,000 or more will need to complete an IRS W-9 form before payment can be issued.

"This case remains a multi-department effort at PEF," Friedman said. "Field Services continues to gather information and answer questions from impacted individuals. We recently sent letters to everyone receiving an interest payment, with general information and the specific amount owed. After Legal drafted the letters, we worked with Field Services, Contract Administration, MIS, and Statewide Facilities to finalize and mail them. We truly appreciate their help."

LABOR ★ HISTORY

Labor History: 160 years of the National Labor Union

By NAJEE WALKER

August 2026 marks the 160th anniversary of the formation of the National Labor Union (NLU) in Baltimore, Maryland. It was the first labor union in the United States that once formed immediately began to study the concept of an 8-hour workday.

The committee on “Eight-Hours in All Its Respects” eventually recommended calling on Congress to establish an 8-hour workday, the start of what is now codified into law through the Fair Labor Standards Act. Congress passed the law in 1868 for federal employees.

The scope of the 1868 law did not come with all the necessary protections, however, as federal workers saw their pay reduced by 20%. A year later, President Ulysses S. Grant issued a proclamation that demanded wages not be cut due to shorter workdays.

Over many decades, the idea of an 8-hour workday would continue to be popular with workers across all sectors. In 1912, then candidate for President Theodore Roosevelt took on the slogan “8 hours for work, 8 hours for rest and 8 hours for what you will” to push the campaign further.

By 1873, the NLU was effectively defunct, but the Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor eventually formed and continued the push for workers’ rights.

The 40-hour work week and “time-and-a-half” overtime pay for those who worked more than 40 hours was added to the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.



Connecting veterans with the services they need

By KATE STICKLES

As a veteran, PEF member Kristine Gardner takes pride in her role as a veteran's benefits advisor with the New York State Department of Veterans' Services (NYSDVS) in Region 2, where she helps connect veterans with education benefits.

"My work includes outreach with SUNY and CUNY schools to make sure veteran students receive the benefits they may not know they're eligible for — benefits they deserve," she said. "I can't stress enough how supportive NYSDVS is, and I'm thankful every day for my job."

Gardner is active in her community, running a food pantry, serving as deputy mayor of Odessa, and working as vice president of Vets for Schuyler. When a local news anchor approached her about expanding the Warriors to Washington program to Elmira, she joined a trip and experienced history firsthand.

Through [Warriors to Washington](#), veterans visited some of the nation's most meaningful landmarks, including Arlington National Cemetery, the Lincoln Memorial, the Pentagon 9/11 Memorial, the U.S. Capitol and the Flight 93 Memorial in Pennsylvania.

Gardner described the trip as unforgettable.

"Veterans organizations have really expanded in the last 10 years," she said. "It was breathtaking to go to Washington. Transportation, housing and meals were covered by Warriors to Washington."

Connecting veterans with services and organizations that can help remains a challenge, but programs are available for needs ranging from fresh food to support during the transition from military to civilian life.

Gardner highlighted [FreshConnect](#), which provides eligible veterans and their families with coupon booklets — typically worth \$50 — to purchase produce, dairy and meats at participating farmers' markets and farm stands. The program typically runs from May or July through December on a first-come, first-served basis.

She also praised the state's collaboration with [Operation Motorsport](#), a veteran-led foundation that supports the recovery of medically retired or retired service members through immersion in motorsports. She was most recently onsite at Watkins Glen International.

For active-duty service members transitioning out of the military, [Onward Ops](#) provides national transition support to help recently separated veterans reintegrate into civilian life. Gardner said the program connects participants with sponsors who can guide them through benefits, housing, food, employment, schools and more.

“Statistics show the first two years are when individuals are most likely to commit suicide,” she said. “Vets are always hesitant to ask questions about benefits. I strongly encourage them to go to their county or state veterans service organization and ask those questions. You might be surprised what you are eligible for — you never know until you ask.”

Visit the [New York State Department of Veterans' Services website](#) to learn more about DVS's mission of Serving All Who Served.



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PEF demands answers on oppressive heat at Sunmount secure center

By KATE STICKLES

While Gov. Kathy Hochul was warning the public about extreme heat in early July, PEF members and their developmentally disabled clients working and living in secure housing at the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities' Sunmount facility in Tupper Lake were dealing with indoor temperatures that soared above 80 degrees.

VIDEO: [President Spence, VP Giddings share Sunmount tour experience](#)

Since PEF went to the media with the story, OPWDD has taken some steps to mitigate the problem, bringing in six portable air conditioners and shifting programming to cooler parts of the facility.

"We appreciate OPWDD's movement on this, but it shouldn't take a union going to the media to effect change," said President Wayne Spence. "The aging infrastructure needs to be overhauled, and we will continue to monitor the state's progress with this project."

During a tour of the facility, President Spence and Vice President Bruce Giddings learned the central air conditioning system serving residents at the facility has reportedly been inoperable for nearly three years.

"These are some of New York's most vulnerable individuals—people with developmental disabilities who depend on the State to provide safe, humane, and dignified living conditions," President Spence said. "It is unacceptable that a critical infrastructure issue affecting the health, comfort, and quality of life of these residents has remained unresolved for such an extended period."

While at Sunmount on July 2 for a contract information meeting ahead of a ratification vote, President Spence and VP Giddings toured the secure center and experienced the oppressive heat firsthand.

RELATED: [Albany Times Union reports on 'oppressive heat' at Sunmount](#)

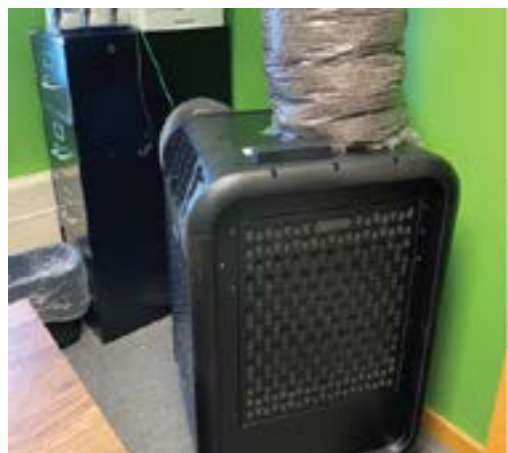
"Our most vulnerable citizens deserve better," VP Giddings said. "They should not have to endure another summer without a functioning air conditioning system because of bureaucratic delays or a lack of urgency."

After the walkthrough, President Spence immediately contacted Director of State Operations Jackie Bray to demand answers.

"New York State must explain why this problem has persisted for years, what steps have been taken to address it, and, most importantly, when residents and staff can expect a permanent solution," President Spence said.



PEF President Wayne Spence, VP Bruce Giddings and PEF members Curtis Hutchins and Royce Cole at Sunmount on July 1



Photos taken inside Sunmount on July 1 show an incorrectly installed mobile AC unit and an indoor temperature of 84 degrees.

We sat down with PEF's President Wayne Spence and Vice President Bruce Giddings to talk about the heat stress at the Sunmount facility.

Here is what Wayne and Bruce had to say about the conditions.



PEF President Spence and VP Giddings on lack of AC at Sunmount (OPWDD)
<https://bit.ly/4f0Misl>

BEHIND THE WALLS

DOCCS leaders gather in Albany to discuss problems ‘Behind the Walls’

By **NAJEE WALKER**

PEF members who work at DOCCS facilities across the state face issues ranging from workplace violence, sexual harassment, and bullying by management. Many say that conditions have only worsened since the Feb. 2025 wildcat strike by corrections officers and the main contributors are the same as they were then -- short staffing, burnout and low morale. Members also say that if untreated, these issues will further endanger both DOCCS employees and incarcerated individuals.

A June 12 meeting spearheaded by PEF's Health and Safety and Training and Education departments sought to find solutions to some of the major concerns highlighted over the years.

The meeting focused on several ways to combat issues in the workplace and effect change moving forward. Members were encouraged to identify their specific workplace concerns, jumpstart activity in their local health and safety committees, and practice exercising the right to refuse hazardous work, which is protected under the New York State Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH Act).

PEF believes those steps can help mitigate some DOCCS workplace issues; however, PEF agrees with members who feel that the root of most safety concerns lies with the HALT Act passed in 2022, which limits how incarcerated individuals are disciplined.

Last year, thanks in part to PEF's advocacy against the HALT Act, a Task Force was formed to find new recommendations for reforming the act with employee safety in mind.

At the meeting, members watched a video released by DOCCS showing the assault of a PEF member at the Lakeview Shock Correctional Facility in Brocton, N.Y., earlier this year. The member, an offender rehabilitation coordinator, was violently assaulted by an incarcerated individual while she was instructing a class with the individual and others. Officers were able to respond and subdue the attacker, but only after the member suffered several injuries. Members say HALT is why assaults are on the rise.

Indeed, data compiled by PEF from DOCCS reports that track violent incidents inside facilities show incidents increased by 45% over the past two years. Mid-State, Marcy, and Five Points Correctional Facilities saw the greatest increase, with Mid-State nearly doubling their incident rate from 68 in 2024 to 131 in 2025.

PEF Statewide Health and Safety Co-Chair Leisa Abraham said that while these numbers are a troubling trend and clearly show HALT is not working as intended, it's still critical for members to document every incident to ensure that data can be brought to conversations with DOCCS, management, and other high-level decisions makers.

"We need the information so we can go back to DOCCS and legislators and the advocates so that they understand that we're trying to keep not only our staff safe, but the incarcerated individuals as well," said Abraham. "Without documentation, we cannot show where the issues are and it all becomes anecdotal."

Gabriela Franklyn is the other co-chair for the Article 18 PEF Health and Safety Committee. She agreed with Abraham that reliable data is key.

“We have to start accurately reporting in real time, immediately advocating in real time and using our resources from a union perspective, then escalating that to engage legislators,” said Franklyn. “We need to be effective communicators, expose what is going on, and hold people—including ourselves—accountable for addressing policies that are not appropriately addressing functions and operations in our facilities.”

PEF Legislative Director Pat Lyons said that PEF and other unions have worked hard to bring the task force recommendations to legislators, but support from the members will make a big difference.

“A lot of our roadblocks are the Governor, the Commissioner, and the culture at DOCCS, as well as other outside forces. These are things we can change if we have you and people working with you supporting us,” said Lyons. “I encourage you to get involved with PEF’s Political Action Committee, send letters to your legislators, and encourage others to do the same. By building conversation and momentum, we can make change a reality.”

For both co-chairs of the health and safety committee, the paths of approach to effect change outlined at the meeting give them hope that members will go back to their facilities confident that the union is behind them.

“I hope that leaders will feel confident talking with both their members and management about their needs as far as workplace health and safety is concerned,” said Abraham. “I am hoping that they can get their members motivated to become much more involved in their own health and safety and less apprehensive to provide the information and documentation that we all need to effect change.”



PEF Retirees President: My unexpected path to public service and union leadership

By JIM CARR

Editors Note: We are reprinting Jim's story with permission from AFT.

Statewide Retirees President Jim Carr was recently featured in [AFT Voices](#), a publication created by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) that highlights the real-life experiences of over 1.8 million union members, including teachers, nurses, and public employees, through personal stories, challenges, and policy views.



I graduated from college with no clear path into my field, and like many new graduates, I took whatever work I could find. My first year out, that meant substitute teaching and refereeing wrestling matches.

A turning point came when I was able to do student teaching in health and physical education with a friend, John Leske, at my old high school. That experience eventually opened a door I didn't expect. In summer 1974, John called me about a job he had at Elmira (N.Y.) Correctional Facility teaching health three nights a week. He was overloaded and asked if I wanted to step in. I said yes, and the decision became the foundation of my entire career.

That first role was part time, but it gave me something I didn't have before: a foot in the system. I learned the job, figured out the expectations, and eventually made it onto the civil service list. From there, I moved from temporary to provisional to permanent employment.

I was hired as a physical education teacher and eventually ran recreation programs for incarcerated individuals. The scope of that work was broad — organized sports, boxing, powerlifting, basketball, softball, soccer and intramural leagues. It wasn't just about activity; it was about structure, routine and engagement.

When I started in 1974, I wasn't part of a union yet. Once I moved into full-time employment, I joined the pension system and became part of the state workforce represented at the time by the Civil Service Employees Association.

At that point, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Council 82, represented correction officers, and later the professional, scientific and technical workforce would form the New York State Public Employees Federation, an affiliate of the AFT. The labor landscape was shifting, and I was entering it right as it was taking shape.

The 1979 prison guards' strike

One of the defining moments of that era was the 1979 correctional officers' strike under New York Gov. Hugh Carey. The strike ran from April 18 to May 5 and became one of the largest prison employee strikes in U.S. history. It was rooted in long-standing frustrations: staffing shortages, declining contract gains, and deteriorating working conditions. The state responded by activating the New York National Guard and bringing in state police to maintain prison operations.

Because public employee strikes were illegal under New York's Taylor Law, participants faced severe penalties, including loss of pay. Even so, the system impact was enormous — facilities were disrupted, leadership was under pressure, and non-striking staff were placed in difficult positions.



At Elmira Correctional Facility, many civilian employees, including myself, were not part of the strike but refused to cross the picket line. After the strike, penalties were applied broadly, including to people who had not participated but did not cross the picket line. That's where my first real experience with union activism began.

At the time, PEF was still in its early formation. We approached the union and asked to pursue an Article 78 legal challenge but were told it likely wouldn't succeed. When leadership declined to move forward, we decided to act independently.

A group of us pooled our own money — about \$250 each — and hired an attorney. We formed what we called a non-uniform employees legal fund and filed affidavits in July 1979. The case, *Betzler v. Carey*, challenged the withholding of pay under the Taylor Law framework.

The process took years. In January 1983, the court ultimately ruled in our favor. Initially, there was partial relief, but the final outcome required full restitution of withheld penalties. It became a precedent-setting decision.

Eventually, even union members who had not participated in the lawsuit were reimbursed. The action helped establish that collective pushback — formal or informal — could shape outcomes for workers.



Life during and after the strike

The personal impact of that period was significant. I had a 1-year-old, a newly purchased home, and a wife who was also working as a teacher in Elmira. When the strike unfolded, we applied for food stamps just to get through the 16 days without pay or benefits.

At the same time, there was real tension in the workplace afterward — between those who crossed the picket line and those who did not, and between staff and the broader correctional system that had been temporarily staffed by outside forces.

In the '70s, the Attica (N.Y.) Prison riot had already reshaped correctional policy and staffing. In its aftermath, reforms led to hiring more civilian professionals — teachers, counselors and program staff — which is how I ended up in the system in the first place.

But many of the underlying issues — staffing shortages, facility classification changes and safety concerns — never fully went away. Over time, facilities like Elmira were reclassified from medium to maximum security without meaningful physical changes, only administrative ones.



Looking back

Over time, I became more involved in union work, serving as a steward, council leader, regional coordinator. After retiring in 2006 with 33 years of service, I continued in leadership roles, including statewide responsibilities.

The union work itself evolved with me. My focus became understanding contracts, representing members effectively, and using grievance and labor-management processes to hold the system accountable. The job wasn't just administrative; it was also advocacy based on real-life experience.

Being a leader in PEF also helped me remember something I learned early on: Solidarity is important. People often made gains by organizing themselves first, whether it was through formal unions or more informal forms of collective action.

The strike years, the legal fight and the early organizing work didn't happen in a vacuum; they changed how I thought about work, duty and collective action.

I learned early on that circumstances don't change on their own. People change them — sometimes through unions, sometimes through courts, and sometimes by refusing to accept outcomes that don't make sense.

Editors Note: We are reprinting Jim's story with permission from AFT.



It's scholarship season – don't miss out on any PEF money!

Costs continue to rise across the country for everything from groceries to gas, and as students prepare to go to college, rising tuition fees are once again on the minds of PEF parents and guardians. PEF offers scholarships to help members with dependents headed to or already in college.

Several PEF Regions and Divisions have scholarship application windows currently open. Click on the [PEF Regional and Division Scholarships tab on this page](#) for the very latest opportunities, but here is what is listed as of August 6:

PEF Division 172 will award eight scholarship awards of \$400 to eligible members or their dependents.

Eligibility requirements:

- Division 172 members and their dependents are eligible.
- PEF membership must be current per the PEF published June 2026 membership list.
- Student must be enrolled full-time (12 or more credit hours/semester) at an accredited school.
- Applications must be received by 4 p.m. Aug. 14, 2026.
- Only one application per eligible student will be accepted.
- A blind drawing will be held during Division 172 Stewards' August 2026 meeting.
- Proof of enrollment is required to receive an award and should be submitted after selection. (A letter of enrollment, transcript of grades, or other proof from the school is acceptable.)
- You can put in separate applications for family members but only one winner per member will be awarded.

Applications are available [here](#).

PEF Division 196 (Roswell Park) is awarding 20 scholarships valued at \$500 each. Applicants must be dependents of an active Division 196 member. Applications will be considered from students attending undergraduate/graduate schools (at least 12 credit hours per semester) and/or craft/trade schools (full time or 12 credit hours per semester). Applications must be postmarked by Aug. 28, 2026, and winners will be announced on Sept. 30, 2026. Previous scholarship recipients are not eligible. [Click here for the application.](#)

PEF Division 234 (OCFS/OTDA) will award up to ten (10) college scholarships of \$500 each to the children of PEF Division 234 members who are undergraduate, graduate, or vocational degree candidates during the Fall 2026 semester. Winners will be randomly selected. You may win only once. [Click here for full scholarship details](#) and [click here for the 2026 application](#). The deadline is Aug. 21, 2026.

PEF Division 194 (State Education Dept.) pays \$200 to the kids of active Division 194 members who graduate high school. This is not a scholarship, and there are no specific requirements other than graduating high school and being the child of a Division 194 member. Please contact Division Treasurer Mickey Dobbin at mickeydobbin@gmail.com for details.

PEF Division 369 (Office of Temporary Disability Assistance) offers a \$400 scholarship to support the educational goals of a deserving student in their community. Applicants must be a graduating high school senior or a current college student and be a direct relative of an active PEF Division 369 member (child, stepchild, grandchild, sibling). The winner will be chosen by a random drawing. All qualified applications will have an equal chance of being selected. Applications are due March 15, 2027, and the winner will be chosen prior to March 31, 2027. [Please click her for full details and the application.](#)

Lastly, PEF offers the **Joseph Scacalossi Scholarship** every year starting in August. The scholarship was created in 1988 as a tribute to a Department of Labor employee who helped form PEF. Winners receive \$1,000 per year for each year of their education. Members who are interested in applying for the scholarship should click the [PEF Scholarships tab on this page](#). The scholarship is only available to dependents of PEF members who are high school seniors or college freshman. You can [read about the latest winners in this Communicator story](#).

PEF also offers a scholarship for female PEF members—not dependents—who are seeking a post-secondary education and degree in any field. The Jean DeBow Women in PEF Scholarship was created in honor of the memory of the former PEF Vice President. The scholarship awards one active female PEF member \$1,000 to assist with college costs. [The application details are on the PEF Scholarships tab on this page.](#)

R7 awards three scholarships this year

Region 7 offered three scholarships this year to dependents of Region 7 members.

Traditionally, the Region only offers two scholarships, honoring Paul Normandeau and Ellen Mainville, who both lost their lives to COVID. This year, Region 7 offered a third scholarship in honor of William "Bill" Crotty, who served as the Regional Coordinator for more than 20 years; sat on the Statewide Political Action Committee; and was a strong supporter of labor, often attending rallies in Albany, New York City and Washington, D.C.

Crotty held various positions and committee appointments during his career and was passionate about helping PEF members, especially Retirees, in his later years. After his retirement, he became the Chapter 7 Retiree President in 2010 until his passing. He was the resident historian for PEF Retirees and shared his knowledge regarding all things PEF including information about past caucuses, presidents and contract battles.

"He will be remembered for his wit, knowledge, passion and dedication," said Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky. "Bill fought long and hard against cancer. To honor Bill's passing, the scholarship committee decided to offer a third scholarship for dependents who are pursuing their education in the medical field."



Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky, Tanner Jay and Region 7 Scholarship Chair Carly Gagnon.

This year's winner is Tanner Jay, who is continuing his education at SUNY Canton, where he will be majoring in Mechanical Engineering. Tanner's father, Jeffery Jay, is a Maintenance Supervisor 3 at SUNY Canton.

Paul R. Normandeau Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship was created in memory of Region 7 member Paul R. Normandeau, who worked for the New York State Department of Transportation. Normandeau loved boating, woodworking, carpentry, and excavation work.



Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky, Braden Nephew, Kaley Passno Nephew and Region 7 Scholarship Chair Carly Gagnon.

Ellen L. Mainville Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship was created in memory of Region 7 member Ellen L. Mainville, who was employed by the Department of Corrections as a teacher at Barehill Correctional Facility. She was also a published writer, poet,

artist, and was an active leader at the New Covenant church in Malone.

This year's winner is Braden Nephew, who is continuing his education at Florida State University studying Finance and Accounting. Braden volunteered at the Plattsburgh Interfaith Food Shelf and was active in his school's newspaper. Braden's mother is Kaley Nephew, who works as a Speech Language Pathologist at OPWDD-Sunmount.



Region 7 Coordinator Barb Stransky, Rory Lawrence, Desirae Goodspeed and Region 7 Scholarship Chair Carly Gagnon.

Bill Crotty Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship honors PEF Region 7 member William "Bill" Crotty.

This year's winner is Rory Lawrence, who plans on attending Clarkson University in the fall. She will be double majoring in Psychology and Health

Sciences. Rory's mother is Desirae Goodspeed, a teacher at Franklin Correctional Facility.

"I would like to thank the Region 7 Scholarship Committee and its Chair, Carly Gagnon, for making these scholarships happen again this year," said Stransky.



RETIREEES IN ACTION: Stand up for our freedoms on Election Day

By JIM CARR – President, PEF Statewide Retirees

Everyone deserves dignity, a life they can afford, and real opportunity. That's why we organize and fight for a secure retirement for all workers and for safe working conditions, a fair wage, affordable quality insurance, and a secure pension.

America belongs to all of us — the people who care, who show up, and the ones who fight for dignity, a life we can afford, and real opportunity — not the wealthy few.

We are Union Strong, engaged, and fired up for the next election!

We are educators, healthcare workers, and public service professionals. We show up every day to support our kids, our families, and our communities. We will not back down against chaos, corruption, and cruelty. We will build communities, not sow division. We demand opportunities, not hardship.

On Election Day, November 3, we are coming together to vote for the values that unite us: Safe and welcoming schools, affordable healthcare, strong communities, and a voice for every person.

That's why communities across the nation must rise up to protect our freedoms and our future. We must make clear that in America, we don't have kings, and we won't back down against chaos, corruption, and cruelty.

But as we fight for working people, President Trump escalates his authoritarian power grab. He thinks his rule is absolute. He is sending masked agents into our streets, terrorizing our communities. They are targeting immigrant families, profiling, arresting and detaining people without warrants. Threatening

to overtake elections. Gutting healthcare, environmental protections, and education when families need them most. Rigging maps to silence voters. Ignoring mass shootings at our schools and in our communities. Driving up the cost of living while handing out massive giveaways to billionaire allies, as families struggle. Starting a war of choice and coming out worse than before!

We need competent leadership — we need fairness, opportunity, and respect for all.

We need to turn out en masse and elect candidates who support unions and working-class values! Our union does a great job of vetting candidates from both parties and then endorsing the best candidates who support unions, workers and retirees.

The biggest mistake we can make is not getting involved. Our unique Republic, which we proudly celebrate on its 250th anniversary this year, only thrives if we stay engaged. Positions and perspectives chosen by individuals are what is protected by our Constitution but cannot exist without our support and engagement.

So, show up if you can, express your views to your representatives, and always care enough to stay informed. We are entering a crucial time which will lay out the path to determine our future!

Together, we will stand up, speak up, show up, and vote — because when we fight, we win.

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.

Charles Browning is a senior attorney at the New York State Insurance Fund in Endicott. To obtain a donation form, email 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 MVPersonnel@omh.ny.gov.

JP Fried is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse. Email 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 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 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 to obtain a donation form.

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

Gretchen Hoffman is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse. Email leaves@upstate.edu to obtain a donation form.

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

Ann Krenn is an Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator at Groveland Correctional Facility in Sonyea.

Nina Ledkovsky is a registered nurse 1 at Green Haven Correctional Facility in Stormville.

Kimberly MacDuff is a taxpayer services specialist trainee 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Albany.

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

Lee Moore is an auditor 2 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Syracuse.

Maliyha A. Muhammad is disability analyst 2 at the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance in Manhattan.

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 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 or 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 to obtain a donation form.

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

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

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

Nicole Welch is an auditor trainee 1 at the Department of Tax and Finance in Syracuse.

Jen Wolcott-Dean is a vocational instructor 4 at Wyoming Correctional Facility in Attica.



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



August 1, 2026

PEF was on hand at the cookout to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the WNY Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO -- congratulations on a quarter century of helping working men and women! Thanks to the PEF leaders and members of the Region 1 Political Action Committee who attended -- as well as Senator April N.M. Baskin, Assemblymember Jon Rivera and Assemblywoman Karen McMahon!



July 31, 2026

PEF Region 2 welcomed 22 stewards for a day of training today. Our thanks to VP Randi DiAntonio, Organizing Coordinator Libby Militello, Field Reps Ellen Coyne and Dan Manning, and Health & Safety Specialist Annamarie Malik for sharing their knowledge and best practices. But most of all -- thank you to the PEF Stewards who came to learn -- you are truly on the front lines when it comes to helping and protecting our members!



July 30, 2026

Members at Greene and Coxsackie Correctional Facilities met with PEF leaders and staff to talk about health and safety concerns at their workplaces, following a walk-through PEF conducted. President Spence joined via Zoom, while VP Bruce Giddings and Region 8 Coordinator Danielle Bridger, along with Statewide Health & Safety Committee Chairs Leisa Abraham and Gabriela Franklyn, answered questions.

July 27, 2026

Some pics from Region 3 Day at Seabreeze! Thank you to all the PEF members and families who joined us for a great day. Special thanks to the PEF Membership Benefits Program, Seabreeze staff, VP Randi DiAntonio, and PEF staff Annabelle Fritz for helping make this event a success!





July 25, 2026

PEF Region 11 Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor and Nurse Consultant Deb Egel were in Philadelphia registering voters as part of PEF's AFT M.O.V.E. grant. The initiative helps educate and mobilize working people about the power of their vote.



July 23, 2026

It was a full house on at the PEF Region 10 & 11 office in NYC as union stewards gathered for training. Thank you to all the members who have stepped up to help organize their workplaces and flex the power of PEF when it comes to enforcing the terms and conditions of public workers' employment!



July 21, 2026

The wind and rain did not keep the members in Hornell away! Region 2 enjoyed some free ice cream outside the state office building. Shoutout to Twin Kiss Sweets & Eats for providing the ice cream!



July 20, 2026

Nothing beats great food, great music, and great company! A huge shoutout to Region 4 Coordinator Monica Moore and the incredible volunteers who made this year's annual Region 4 Clambake a success. With beautiful weather, delicious food, a seven-piece band, and 160 members in attendance, it was an unforgettable evening. Thanks to everyone who came out and made it such a fantastic event!



July 12, 2026

Thanks to PEF Membership Benefits Program for another awesome Family Fun Day at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, N.J.!



Letters to the Editor

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

We want to hear from you!

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

